Science Societies

Telling your agronomic story

By Peter Kyveryga, ASA President

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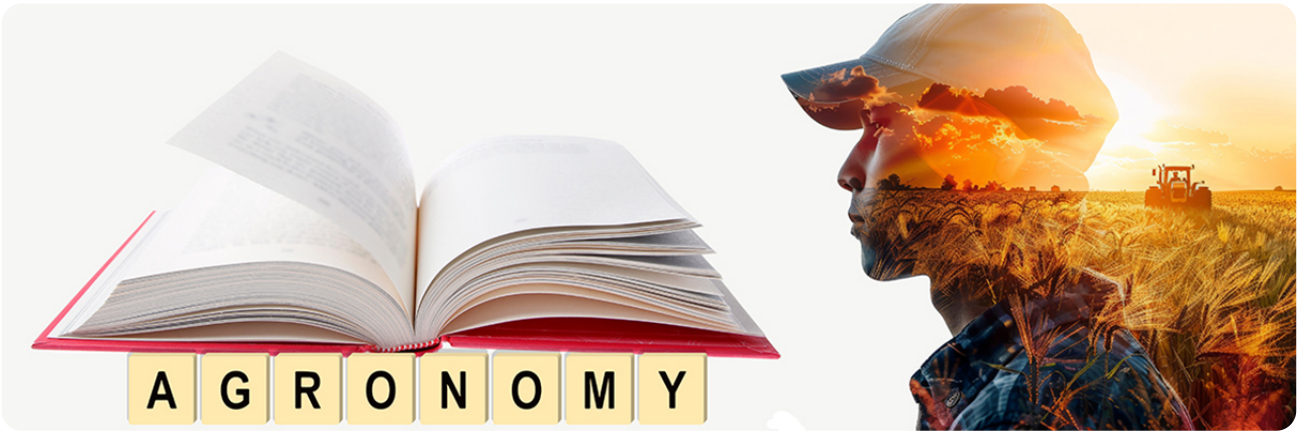

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As a graduate student at Iowa State University, I was crossing the U.S. port of entry from an international flight. A custom boarder protection officer politely asked: “What do you study in the U.S.”? I proudly replied: “Agronomy.” The officer looked at me with visible confusion and tried to repeat my words: “Economy? Astronomy?” I tried to correct the officer: “It is “A-g-r-o-n-o-m-y. It’s a science about crops and soil and agriculture.” The officer replied: “Hmm, that sounds interesting. I never heard about

agronomy. It must be cool!"

Peter Kyveryga, ASA President.

I've had similar conversations regardless of whether I landed in Chicago, Minneapolis, or Detroit. This is not surprising since only 3% of the U.S. population is actively engaged in agriculture. This puts us in a unique situation where a small fraction of the country's population (farmers, ranchers, and agricultural professionals like ourselves) are responsible for feeding this large nation and people abroad.

Choosing agronomy as my career was easy growing up in a small village in Western Ukraine where almost all our food was produced locally. Most of the kids in the village had to help their parents take care of farm animals and manually manage large (several acres in size) gardens. That was not fun if you were doing all this work all summer long!

Surprisingly, I found peace, serenity, and relaxation while seeding plants, pulling weeds, hoeing, digging potatoes, and picking vegetables or fruits. Although my favorite subjects at school were math and physics, by the age of 15, I knew that agronomy would be my life calling. Later, as a graduate student, I realized that I could still apply the beautiful logic of math and physics to my complex research problems in soil science and agronomy.

An expanding profession with new challenges

Whether you are a student (undergraduate or graduate), researcher (university, government, or private company), or a practicing professional (e.g., Certified Crop Adviser), being an agronomist can mean something different. Originally, agronomy was defined as a profession "to increase and disseminate knowledge of crops and soils and the conditions affecting them." The agronomist's job was to visit fields and study crops

and share this knowledge with local farmers. Now, some parts of agronomic research can be done remotely, a long distance from fields using modern computing, remote-sensing, and cloud-based digital technologies. However, physically visiting farms and fields is still important.

New research areas and challenges are constantly emerging, and the science of agronomy is ready to tackle them.

The goals of agronomy have also expanded and changed over time. Currently, agronomy aims not only to grow food for people and forage for animals, but also produce fiber and fuel for industry and provide various societal and ecosystem services. New research areas and challenges are constantly emerging, and the science of agronomy is ready to tackle them. Sustainable intensification, climate-smart and regenerative agriculture, soil health, circular economy, on-farm research, conservation agronomy, and digital or smart agriculture are some of these new emerging areas.

During the CANVAS conference in San Antonio last November, I was surprised to meet two plant pathologists. They both have been attending the meetings for the last several years. They cited that they found a lot of inspiration for their own research with plant diseases by attending our meetings and interacting with students and researchers who are doing cutting-edge research studying various aspect of agronomic practices and utilizing modeling tools. That was very pleasant to hear!

Attracting new professionals and extending membership to them and opening opportunities for other related disciplines is just one of the six objectives ASA's ambitious strategic plan. The other objectives are to build awareness and appreciation of agronomy, extend our continuing education effort, make our journals highly impactful and desirable, expand our global reach, and promote future workforce development.

There are six main objectives to ASA's strategic plan.

As a whole society, we have a lot of work to do. This is the second year of the plan, and we outlined specific tactics and desired outcomes for each objective. To accomplish our strategic initiatives, we need a community effort. I would like to welcome numerous volunteers who choose to lead and contribute to the ASA sections and communities, committees, and other groups this year. And thanks to many other

members who are planning to attend and present at the CANVAS 2025, visit the Society website, attend Society webinars, or submit manuscripts to the Society's journals.

While we are all busy with our daily responsibilities either in a classroom, laboratory, field, or at home, please find time to tell your story about your path to agronomy. You can do so within your personal Bio section of the Member Hub. We'd also like to hear your perspectives about ASA, the future of agronomy as a discipline and as a profession, and your challenges and hopes as you embark on your career journey. This can be done by navigating to the Circles section of the Member Hub and posting your comments to the Circle of your choice.

Best luck in all your agronomic initiatives and resolutions!
