



February 5, 2011

WSSA President's Report:

I'm going to miss this job; I have to admit it, I've had a good time! This year has gone so fast, it just seems like I'm just starting, but looking back I can see that we did get a lot done. One of WSSA's key strategic missions is to provide science-based information to the public and government policymakers while promoting research, education, and outreach activities. I think that, by any measure, we've had the impact we intended.

When the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) released their 2010 Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) competitive grants program request for applications (RFAs) with little or no opportunity for Weed Science research, extension or education funding, we developed a fast-paced national advocacy program that sent our sonorous message of disappointment as clearly as possible. Just a few weeks ago, we found that NIFA did hear us and has addressed our need by including a foundational grant program for "Controlling Weedy and Invasive Plants" in the upcoming 2011 AFRI RFA, stating that "*Areas believed to have been under-represented in the FY 2010 RFAs, such as conventional plant and animal breeding, weed science, and food technology are more clearly offered in this FY 2011 RFA*".

In further recognition of our discipline, NIFA stated the following as background under the Program Area Description for *Plant Health and Production and Plant Products*:

Plant production and health plays a critical role in the sustainability and competitiveness of U.S. agriculture and, as a result, in the success and growth of the Nation's economy. An increased understanding of plant biology from the genome to the systems level provides the foundation for development of plant varieties with increased yield, reduced production costs, enhanced quality, and new uses for food and industry. Similarly, the study of weedy plants and of insects and microbes associated with plants underpins the development of innovative approaches to increase effects of beneficial microbes and arthropods and to limit harmful effects of new or re-emerging pathogens, pests, and weeds. Herbicide-resistant weed species have become an increasing problem in many cropping systems due in large part to the widespread reliance on herbicides as a primary method of weed management. Increased knowledge of plant systems and the various factors that affect plant productivity will allow U.S. agriculture to face critical needs in areas such as bioenergy, climate change, loss of agricultural land, and increasing global competition.

The "Plant Health and Production and Plant Products" program will have \$23 million in grant funding available in four priority areas in 2011.

The four areas are:

1. Biology of Agricultural Plants
2. Understanding Plant-Associated Microorganisms
3. Controlling Weedy and Invasive Plants
4. Insects and Nematodes

The Program Area Contact is Michael Bowers. This priority area will support projects that “*focus on improving our understanding of relationships between agronomic practices and the evolution, spread, and subsequent dynamics of herbicide resistance based on an understanding of ecological fitness and gene flow in weed populations and use of ecological processes, including integrated pest management, to manage and control weedy and invasive species*”.

I greatly appreciate the contribution of our Director of Science Policy and Executive Committee in reinstating NIFA Weed Science funding, the excellent support of our Public Awareness Committee in ramping up the volume, and especially, the collective voice of all the Regional Societies in committing to the message. This advocacy effort went forward with clear discussions at NIFA and press releases that were widely cited in trade articles, newspapers and even radio talk shows. This is a great example of how we can create change when we're working together and speaking for the discipline as a Society with a single unified voice. This effort highlights in the importance of all WSSA advocacy efforts in the areas important to our membership and science and we continue to develop WSSA's credibility with policy and decision makers where it's most important.

This year, we created the special WSSA S-71 Herbicide Resistance Education Committee to address emerging issues on the topic. Lead by David Shaw (Mississippi State University), this committee has made great progress in developing a comprehensive education strategy on herbicide resistance and, through a sub-committee lead by John Soteres (Monsanto), a set of training modules that can be used by Extension educators to bring the message forward. This effort will effectively position WSSA as the go-to organization for science-based information on herbicide resistant weeds. Additionally, we also completed the first of two review papers funded by APHIS and are making great progress on the second.

- *The Influences of Herbicide-Resistant Crops on the Evolution of Herbicide-Resistant Weeds*
 - Bill Vencill, University of Georgia, Editor
 - Completed and sent to APHIS
 - Submitted for publication in Weed Science (open access)
- *Herbicide-Resistant Weeds Management Report*
 - David Shaw, Mississippi State University, Editor
 - Target date for completion is early to mid-2011
 - Will also be published in Weed Science (open access)

In close communication with EPA through our WSSA-EPA Subject Matter Expert, Jill Schroeder (New Mexico State University), we have been steadily moving forward to coordinate our resistance management education efforts with the Agency. We have a lot of support for progress here and I expect that we can meet this need and avoid a command and control regulatory response. We understand that a resistance management education program can only help if it is based on a comprehensive understanding of resistance, both as an economic as well as a biological phenomenon, and only if it includes active participation by all parties that contribute significantly to herbicide use decisions. We have growing support for this effort from the National Research Council, National Cotton Council, National Corn Growers Association, American Soybean Association, National Association of Conservation Districts, CropLife America and the North America Herbicide Resistance Action Committee. A wide range of new materials are planned for the WSSA website including new training modules targeting the Certified Crop Advisor program, grower organizations, and Extension Specialist. In recognition of these efforts, the National Research Council has invited WSSA to hold a national roll-out symposium of our materials at the National Academy of Science in Washington, DC in 2011.

Also this year, we've reached out to several of the other applied science societies, including the Entomological Society of America- Plant Insect Ecosystems Section and the American Phytopathological Society, to join us in our efforts in increase science's impact on regulatory decisions. All three societies submitted joint comments signed by each society president to EPA on the November, 2009, Spray Drift Pesticide Registration Notice to address our concerns. Further, to amplify our individual contributions, we now have EPA Subject Matter Experts from all three disciplines working together at EPA. This is incredible progress and makes the applied sciences available to policy makers in a way that has never been greater or more direct.

The regulation of spray drift remains problematical; the risk assessment tools that EPA employs are based on aging data and the application technology in current use has improved significantly. Last September, 2010, WSSA hosted Bob Wolf, University of Nebraska, at EPA in a seminar set up by our EPA Subject Matter Expert, Jill Schroeder, to give the Agency a more clear view of the progress that has been made in creating more accurate methods to apply herbicides with less drift. The Agency was very interested in this educational effort and I believe that we moved them forward in their understanding. Since they will come out with a final version of the Spray Drift Pesticide Registration Notice in just a few months, this educational effort was also very timely.

WSSA has shown real leadership in the development of important national policies through our deep involvement in the developing National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permitting program for pesticide use in the riparian corridor. This new rule will come into force this coming April, 2011, and sets a trap for the weed management practitioner by potentially opening their records to hunter-seeker lawyers seeking to exploit these new requirements through citizen lawsuits or/and by invoking Agency actions. To help EPA understand the potential impact of this program, Kurt Getsinger (US Army Corps of Engineers, Aquatic Plant Management Society) and

Jill Schroeder have worked with EPA's Office of Water to help them appreciate the need for weed management in the riparian corridor. The EPA Office of Water is quite comfortable with manufacturing facilities and waste reduction efforts in that context, but is completely unfamiliar with any aspect of agriculture or invasive plant management. To develop their understanding, we took them on educational tours of the well developed but very different weed management efforts in Florida and New Mexico. WSSA also submitted comments signed by our leadership and all the presidents of the Regional Weed Science Societies on the proposed NPDES Pesticide General Permit; this document was submitted by Lee VanWychen to provide EPA with our expert insight into its various aspects and was posted on our website. These opportunities were critically important to EPA as they develop this rule and represent yet another area of WSSA impact on public policy and weed management.

This year we've separated National Invasive Species Week (NISAW) from any congressional advocacy efforts to address declining interest, increase our impact and protect the government land management agencies from a serious conflict of interest. NISAW is being planned for February 28 to March 4, 2011 as a joint effort by WSSA and the National Invasive Species Council to coordinate invasive species education and awareness events. Along with the North America Weed Management Association (NAWMA), WSSA is also participating in a separate March 14-16, 2011 National Invasive Species Advocacy Week that employs the efforts of the *Healthy Habitats Coalition* (HHC) to lobby Congress and the Administration to act on a recently passed Western Governors Association resolution, specifically to increase on-the-ground invasive species management efforts funded through greater efficiency in program administration; this effort also includes participation by the Entomological Society of America- Plant Insect Ecosystems Section and a number of state invasive species councils and noxious weed management boards.

Any applied scientific society only moves forward through its commitment to a public service vision. In my humble view, WSSA has done a great job in its mission by creating a forum that brings scientists, practitioners, policy makers, industry, students and stewards of the land together to advance Weed Science. By promoting weed management policy based in science, I believe that we have effectively created the right opportunities to engage academia, policy makers, land managers, weed management practitioners and industry in bringing ideas and people together solve some of society's pressing problems. I have very much enjoyed my term as President and am grateful for the opportunity to serve.

In your service,
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