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ASHS Presence on Capitol Hill

Prior to 2007, ASHS had no organized presence on Capitol Hill. While ASHS had supported several Congressional Science Fellows (ASHS Past-President George Wilson was the last Fellow in 1991) there was never a strategic ASHS directive. However, at the 2005 Annual Business Meeting in Las Vegas, Thomas Björkman of Cornell University, challenged ASHS to better serve the membership by becoming more visible on the national scene—and pushing for ASHS membership participation on grant review panels and areas where decisions were being made in Horticulture at federal levels currently with the exclusion of ASHS members. This caught the ear of then ASHS Research Division Vice President John Clark – and the ASHS National Issues Task Force (NITF) was subsequently formed, initially chaired by John and now by Thomas. Their charge was to positively affect the national/government profile of Horticulture: Horticultural Science and its research, extension, and teaching.

In January 2007, Mike Neff, with the support of the NITF and ASHS Board of Directors contracted with Jonathan Moore to be the ASHS National Issues Consultant to share the Society’s positions on Capitol Hill and other governmental

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agencies. Jonathan hit the ground running, and has been very effective in lining up visits with members of congress, staffers, and others that he, Mike, and Thomas believe would be of value to share our story with. Jonathan continually visits staffers on behalf of ASHS, monitors issues, helps prepare ASHS response to these issues, and presents our positions effectively to decision makers. Jonathan also writes a very timely ASHS Newsletter column to keep the membership abreast of legislative affairs.

ASHS Message

While ASHS, as a 501(c)3 and (h) organization, is limited in the amount of legislative activities we can pursue, we can meet and present our position on key legislative issues that affect Horticulture. Our current message to selected congressional members includes:

“The American Society for Horticultural Science (ASHS) ‘Science for Specialty Crops,’ the premier professional society for horticultural researchers at our nation’s Land Grant institutions, as well as those serving in government and private industry, appreciates your support for a sustainable and competitive specialty crop research system.

Based on your panel’s petition for funding priority requests for Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, we present our preferences for competitive research as best represents ongoing projects by ASHS members, in accordance with programs addressing immediate needs of consumers, processors, and growers. ASHS’ funding priorities for FY 2012 are as follows: 1. Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI), 2. Specialty Crop Block Grants, 3. Organic Agriculture Research & Education Initiative (OREI), 4. Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), 5. Agriculture Food & Research Initiative (AFRI), 6. National Clean Plant Network (NCPN), and 7. Pest and Disease Management.

Administered either through the National Institute for Food & Agriculture (NIFA), the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), or the Agriculture Marketing Service (AMS), these USDA programs make enormous contributions to the health and well-being of our fellow citizens, while promoting good environmental stewardship and resource conservation practices. Spawning new and innovative technologies, agriculture research continues to meet the demanding challenges of a growing population, and serves as a foundation for our economic growth and competitiveness on a global scale. We appreciate your review and consideration of this priority list, and are prepared to address any questions you or your staff may have with any of these programs.”

Grass Roots Help Needed from Membership

As Jonathan Moore has written in his ASHS columns: the NITF will continue to advocate for research’s rightful place at USDA’s budget table. Compared with commodity, food relief, and marketing programs, research has an inordinately small slice of the USDA’s budget pie, especially when factoring in that research and science education impact all segments of agriculture. Drastic cuts for research puts sustainability and advancement of our food supply at great risk, i.e. FOOD SECURITY = NATIONAL SECURITY. That is another message ASHS will ramp up as we move toward new Farm Bill legislation. Other ASHS messages to Congress includes that research, education, and extension services are not subsidy-oriented. Nor are they taxpayer bailouts. Rather, they are platforms for scientific discovery and education outreach with immeasurable benefits for the betterment of society. How can we consider human health or costly medical programs without first addressing access to wholesome foods—i.e., fruits and vegetables that supply essential vitamins for human nutrition?

These meetings are invaluable for conveying our accomplishments directly to lawmakers and learning about how ASHS can influence the current and future policies impacting horticulture.
ASHS Presents Awards at the 2011 Intel International Science and Engineering Fair

Young horticultural scientists were again honored this year for their outstanding research in horticulture at the 2011 ISEF in Los Angeles, California, May 8–13. ASHS judge Robert Mazalewski, University of California, Davis, reviewed 43 finalists in Plant Science at this year’s fair.

The First Award ($1000) winner honored by ASHS is Andrew Michael Joseph, 16, from Episcopal High School of Jacksonville, Jacksonville, Florida, for his presentation “Improving Environmental Stress Tolerance: The Genetic Engineering of the Oryza sativa Plant Carrying the Escherichia coli Genes Producing Trehalose (Year Two”).

Aradhana Sinha, 14, of Salinas High School, Salinas, California, received Second Award ($500) for “Triforine Sensitivity in Lettuce.” Third Award ($250) was given to Kaitlin Elizabeth Larkin, 17, from Wentzville Holt High School, Wentzville, Missouri, for her work “Identification of the Source of Indeterminate DNA in Fluorescence Assays of Sterile Seed Corn (Zea mays).”

In addition to the cash awards presented by the Society, ASHS also offers a complimentary one-year membership, subscriptions to all three journals for the student and their high school library, and a certificate.

The Society thanks Dr. Mazalewski for taking the time, and making the effort, to represent ASHS at this year’s fair.

While ASHS certainly promotes horticultural science in myriad ways, this event is one of the very best. The 2012 Intel ISEF will be held in May 13–18, 2012, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Special Awards Judging takes place over a 2-day period during the entire fair. If any ASHS Members in that part of the country are interested in participating in this great event (up to three), please contact Mike Neff at mwneff@ashs.org. You won’t regret it!


We will need ASHS membership success stories. As Jonathan writes, the NITF needs membership help with descriptions of trans-disciplinary research with clear and concise objectives, including definable dividends for the general public, that resonate with Congress and their constituents.

It is horticultural research’s best defense for maintaining a viable foothold within USDA’s budget. “Show us tangible benefits of Hort research” is what Congress will be looking for in this era of shrinking budgets. ASHS success stories will keep horticulture’s message prominent within the halls of Congress.

This is a new era of accountability. We need to brush up on that 30-second elevator speech about who we are, what we do, and why it is critical to society. While we have come a long way in getting Horticulture, Specialty Crops and the ASHS message “expressed and understood,” we need to continually polish our approach and keep on-message.

ASHS will be developing a plan to get as many ASHS members involved as the federal budget and Farm Bill (2012) develops further—quite similar to what was done in 2007–08.

Highest Abstract Submissions in 16 years for the ASHS Hawaii Meetings!!

The response to the 2011 September Annual Conference in Hawaii has been outstanding. We have had the most abstracts submitted for papers and posters since the 1995 Conference in Montreal. A great location and venue at reasonable prices, really does matter! Registration at regular rates is still open. Be sure to make your travel arrangements ASAP.

Keep in touch!

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