

WSSA NIFA Fellow 2018 Progress Report

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Initial Activities

I began my service as WSSA during fall of 2018. I have made two visits to NIFA, both with Donn Shilling. The first visit on October 21-23 was primarily intended as an initial opportunity for introductions. On this visit Donn and I visited with our host, Mike Fitzner. We were also able to meet with several NIFA National Program Leaders (NPLs): Shing Kwok, Tom Bewick, Herb Bolton, Matheiu Ngouajio, Michael Bowers, and Ann Lichens-Park. The second visit, on December 11-13, focused on working with Andrew Clark, an IT Specialist who is helping with an analysis of historical data on NIFA funding of weed science research. Donn and I made very good progress discussing with Andrew the most valuable data comparisons and summaries, and understanding what analyses are and are not possible. On this second visit I also met with NPLs Karolyn Cruz and Mathieu Ngouajio.

Future Priorities

Advocacy for WSSA Research Funding Priorities: The WSSA Research and Competitive Grants Committee has identified several research priorities that have been communicated to NIFA in 2018 as part of a stakeholder input process. The two highest priorities were 1) new technologies for precision mechanical weed control and 2) molecular biology and genomic tools to understand the biology of weeds. I will work to encourage NIFA to initiate competitive funding programs in these high priority area. Donn and I have each received encouraging reaction to the idea of a weed genomics competitive grants program and I will work to further elevate this idea within the NIFA NPLs.

I have requested that WSSA form a NIFA Fellow Advisory Committee and I'm looking forward to the first meeting with this group at the WSSA 2019 Annual Meeting in New Orleans. The committee consists of the Past President, President, President Elect, Vice President, Executive Science Policy Director, Chair of the Science Policy Committee, and Chair of the Research and Competitive Grants Committee.

Communication with WSSA Members: NIFA and the NIFA competitive grants programs are very complex and dynamic. I am still in the process of understanding this complexity. I hope to help WSSA members become more fully aware of the various competitive grants programs relevant

to weed science research, some of which are not initially obvious. I hope to keep WSSA members aware of new funding opportunities through the NIFA competitive grants program.

Donn and I have discussed the possibility of a competitive grants symposium at the 2020 WSSA Annual Meeting. The last symposium on this topic, in Tucson, was very successful and much has changed since that meeting. This symposium would be a great forum to present the results of the historical funding analysis by Andrew Clark. It could also serve as an opportunity to review the current funding opportunities through NIFA, along with other related topics. We are currently in the conceptual phase of planning this symposium.

Current Challenges

There are two developments that have created significant instability and uncertainty within NIFA. As with much of the federal government, NIFA staff were furloughed for a total of 35 days and the risk of a second government shutdown still exists. Perhaps the most serious development is the proposal to relocate NIFA to an undetermined location outside the National Capitol Region. WSSA submitted a letter communicating concerns with this proposal. I was involved in drafting the document, which was reviewed by the WSSA Executive Committee and signed by the WSSA President. The resolution of this proposal is unclear at this time, and the timeframe for a final decision has likely been delayed by the 35-day government shutdown. This is a rapidly evolving situation that is highly political. I will be prepared to give an update at the NIFA Fellow Advisory Committee Meeting. Lee VanWycken is closely monitoring this situation.

The proposal to relocate NIFA and the government shutdown will certainly limit my involvement in the short term. The outcome of the proposed NIFA relocation may result in major disruption during 2019, including staff attrition, depending on the new location selected. I will do my best to stay engaged with key NIFA staff during this transition. I am excited to have the opportunity to serve as the WSSA NIFA Fellow and I look forward to the challenge.