



For Immediate Release

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Initiative Nurtures Women Pursuing Weed Science Careers

LAWRENCE, Kansas – February 25, 2015 – Today less than 15 percent of the members of the Weed Science Society of America (WSSA) are women. It’s a sobering statistic, but one that reflects national trends.

According to data gathered by the National Academies,¹ roughly equal numbers of women and men earn degrees in the agricultural sciences. However, women lag behind when it comes to pursuing a career in their field of study. Of the 8,000 Ph.D. holders employed in the agricultural and food sciences today, women represent only about a third.

Anita Dille, a professor of agronomy at Kansas State University and a WSSA member, is one of those bucking the trend. She says her career in weed science has been incredibly rewarding, and she wishes more women would follow in her footsteps.

As president-elect of North Central Weed Science Society (NCWSS) and the first woman to hold that position, Dille is hoping to expose women studying weed science to individuals who can serve as career mentors. With enthusiastic support of her board, she recently launched a new networking breakfast scheduled during the NCWSS annual meeting. Nearly 50 women attended the first event in December 2014 – half students and half established weed scientists.

“It was great way for students like me to connect with those further along in their careers,” said Cara McCauley, a graduate student in weed science at Purdue University. “It was my first NCWSS meeting, and I didn’t know many people. But after our breakfast, I was able to see familiar faces in the crowd and continue the conversations we started.”

Dille says that’s exactly the response she was after.

“We want to help women feel more comfortable and welcomed by the organization and to offer opportunities for networking and professional development,” she said. “Meeting and talking to

women already working in the field can help them understand potential career paths that provide a diverse and rewarding way to use what they've learned."

Dille is quick to point to the impact of women on her own career. She grew up on a farm where she helped her family in the fields. It seemed natural to pursue an undergraduate degree in agricultural science at the University of Guelph in Canada, but she was unsure what she wanted to do with her degree. During her senior year, though, she worked as an intern under Susan Weaver, Ph.D., at Agriculture Canada.

"I worked with her on a research project I was really interested in, and I came away knowing that weed science research was the direction I wanted to pursue," she said.

Today Dille conducts studies on the ecology of weeds in sorghum, corn, soybean and winter wheat crops. And in the classroom, she is training future agronomists in weed science and the principles of Integrated Weed Management – including weed identification and control.

"Today is an exciting time to be a weed scientist, with a host of challenges to address," says Lee Van Wychen, Ph.D., science policy director of the Weed Science Society of America. "Experts with the National Laboratory for Agriculture and the Environment say our growing population will need more food over the next four decades than we've cumulatively produced over the past 10,000 years. That makes it imperative that we engage both men and women who have the skills needed to help us protect crops from the ravages of weeds."

About the Weed Science Society of America

The Weed Science Society of America, a nonprofit scientific society, was founded in 1956 to encourage and promote the development of knowledge concerning weeds and their impact on the environment. The Society promotes research, education and extension outreach activities related to weeds, provides science-based information to the public and policy makers, fosters awareness of weeds and their impact on managed and natural ecosystems, and promotes cooperation among weed science organizations across the nation and around the world. For more information, visit www.wssa.net.

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¹ http://sites.nationalacademies.org/PGA/cwsem/PGA_049131