



A Brief History of the Soil Science Society of America

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The Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) was officially born on November 18, 1936 at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C. with Richard Bradfield as the first President. SSSA was created from the merger of the American Soil Survey Association and the Soils Section of American Society of Agronomy (ASA). Six sections were established: 1) physics, 2) chemistry, 3) microbiology, 4) fertility, 5) morphology, and 6) technology, and total membership was less than 200. The first issue of SSSA Journal, then called SSSA Proceedings, published 87 items totaling 526 pages. The first recorded bank balance for SSSA was at the end of the 1937-38 fiscal year, and showed the Society to be worth \$1,300.03. The Soils Section of ASA became the official American section of the International Society of Soil Science in 1934, and the new SSSA inherited that distinction which it retains to this day.

SSSA has grown significantly since those early days. The original six sections have grown to 11 divisions, and some of those divisions have changed their names to reflect changes occurring within soil science. For example, the original section 5, morphology, is now Division S05 – Pedology after spending many years under other names such as Division V – Soil Classification and Division S-5 – Soil Genesis, Morphology, and Classification. SSSA was incorporated in the State of Wisconsin, USA on 22 January, 1952. Several awards have been developed to recognize achievement in the field of soil science, including the SSSA Presidential Award, Don and Betty Kirkham Soil Physics Award, Emil Truog Soil Science Award, International Soil Science Award, Irrrometer Professional Certification Service Award, L.R. Ahuja Ag Systems Modeling Award, Marion L. and Chrystie M. Jackson Soil Science Award, Soil Science Applied Research Award, Soil Science Distinguished Service Award, Soil Science Education Award, Soil Science Industry and Professional Leadership Award, Soil Science Research Award, and SSSA Early Career Professional Award. SSSA has also hosted the World Congress of Soil Science in 1960 and 2006.

In 2010 SSSA membership was at 6,367, the third highest membership total in SSSA history. SSSAJ published 259 items totaling 2,201 pages. But unlike 1937, SSSAJ is no longer SSSA's only journal. In 2009 Journal of Environmental Quality published 272 items on 2,480 pages, Soil Survey Horizons (renamed Soil Horizons in 2012) published 26 items on 133 pages, Vadose Zone Journal published 116 items on 1,088 pages, and Journal of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Education published 48 items on 250 pages, giving Society journals a total of 721 items published on 6,132 pages. At the end of 2010 SSSA was worth \$3,130,163. All of these numbers show significant achievement in the years since the Society's founding, but not all of those years have been rosy. For example, SSSA's membership dropped from an all-time high of 6,402 in 1985 to 5,319 in 2002 and the Society's net worth declined from \$2,132,750 in 1999 to \$984,866 in 2002. This period from the mid-1980s through the early 2000s has probably been the most challenging so far in SSSA's history.

Many changes are also in store going into the future. Over the past few years SSSA has become increasingly independent from ASA. While the two societies (along with the Crop Science Society of America (CSSA)) still maintain close ties, the members of SSSA have expressed a desire to emphasize that soils are more than agronomic. One indication of this increasing independence can be seen in the annual meetings. SSSA met jointly with the Geological Society of America in 2008 and will meet with the Entomological Society of America in 2015. There are also plans for SSSA to meet independently of ASA and CSSA for the first time in 2018. Another indication is the recent rearrangement of the governing structures of ASA, CSSA, and SSSA.