

Editorial

There is much going on in soil science. The era of doom and gloom and the idea that the discipline is in a poor state is over in most parts of the world. There are heaps of new projects creating many new job positions in a period that unemployment rates explode in several countries. It may be caused by the increasing interest in food production, the need for sustainable agriculture and the overall awareness of the soil as a natural capital – not only for our daily food but also related to the water supply and even: the weather. It may also be sparked by the financial crisis causing an apparent wish of many governments to make strategic investments in times of financial and market uncertainty.

The already infamous ‘Restore science to its rightful place’ implies considerably more funds for the sciences. However, views differ how the recession influences scientific directions and *Nature* summarised this as follows: ‘Science is key to nation-building during a recession but scientists must learn to convince politicians of the need to protect research budgets. Building global links and breaking down the barriers between disciplines is vital if the world is to weather the financial squeeze. Central banks must also end their obsession with cutting interest rates and technology start-ups will need to cut costs and sell what they can. A stimulus package for the developing world could, however, benefit everyone.’ (www.nature.com/recessionwatch). This all affects soil science and its funding in a positive way.


Perhaps the current soils focus of governments and UN institutions follows the increased interest of the general public in soils and the environment - whether that has happened through the soils thematic issue of the *National Geographic* (September 2009) or the development of a home-garden at the White House premises. Scientists, including those that study soils, also realise that in modern society scientific input is essential and policy debates cannot be escaped. As *Nature* recently wrote: ‘..if responsible researchers do not



With the hands in soil (hoe, hoe, hoe) following the adagiums: *Garden to cut food costs and Plant a Victory Garden.*

offer their opinions on policy, others will.’ As a result, soil legislation is slowly but steadily developing in many countries and also at the EU level. Soils have entered the policy arena.

Whatever the reasons are, the widespread interests and new projects in soil science coincide with a quantum leap in the development of technologies to measure, monitor and map soils. It occurs at a scale that could not be envisioned before and importantly: with an accuracy and measured uncertainty that is demanded by the users of soil information. The result is that we have a little better understanding of the temporal and spatial pattern of soils. Our soil science journals contain daily examples of this all; over 17,000 soil science articles appear annually. Of course there is dilution and some recycling of ideas but these articles are not written by machines and it clearly shows that soil science is thriving.



The IUSS keeps promoting soil science and supporting all its activities across the globe. The Bulletin, published since 1952, is one of the examples and aims to inform the soil science community on its many activities and its many branches. Our good friend Hans van Baren has been involved with the Bulletin since the early 1970s. He was the Deputy Secretary General from 1990 to 2002 and book review editor of the Bulletin – Hans passed away on 27th January 2009. He spent most of his working life in soil science, promoting it as a discipline, and establishing a fine network of institutions and soil scientists across the world. That has been of great benefit to the ISSS/IUSS and also to ISRIC where Hans worked and continue to work since his retirement in 1997. I took over his position in 2002. Now our weekly coffees and discussions are over, I will continue to work in his spirit and can only strive to serve the global community of soil scientists as good as he did – with the wind in the sails.

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