

AMSA—50 Years and Beyond

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Faced with the challenge of discussing “AMSA – 50 years and beyond,” I am reminded of a true story. While I was in graduate school, a former roommate of mine went to study under Dr. Russell Cross, who was at the USDA laboratory in Beltsville, MD at the time. One of his assignments was to estimate ground beef production five years out for a media story Russell was doing. The only problem was, my friend slipped a decimal and his estimate was ten times higher than what could reasonably have been expected. By the time the error was discovered, the information had already been released to the press. When confronted with the mistake, the only response my former roommate could muster was “Well, look on the bright side, Dr. Cross. At least it will be five years before they can call you a liar.” In this case, there’s a very good chance I won’t be around when your chance comes!

In order to figure out where we are going, I think it is instructive that we pause a moment and reflect on where we’ve been. For as long as I can remember, I have heard about Cooperative Meat Investigations, organized by Roscoe C. Pollock of the National Live Stock and Meat Board, being the genesis of this organization. It wasn’t until I carefully read the history of the Reciprocal Meat Conference and the AMSA, compiled by some of our members in 1972, that I really came to appreciate the perspective that history could provide. Somewhere recently I read that “*we learn from experience that we don’t learn from experience.*” I suspect that’s true when we fail to study history. But after my review, I thought I came away with a better understanding of who we are and where we’ve been.

The National Live Stock and Meat Board was formed in 1924 and at their very first meeting, someone raised a question about meat quality. R. C. Pollock was charged with getting the USDA and Agricultural Experiment Stations together to address the problem. I think it’s interesting that their very first project was entitled “A Study of Factors Which Influence the Quality and Palatability of Meat.” Without too much

effort, you could probably find essentially the same title on grant proposals today. One thing I learned was that R.C. worked fast. That same year, he organized a conference with Agriculture Experiment Stations scientists, federal workers, and industry representatives to bring attention to the issue. These efforts to coordinate research and to avoid duplication led to “Cooperative Meat Investigations,” a concept that was endorsed and funded by USDA in 1925. So, the history of our organization was firmly rooted in scientific expertise and joint cooperation.

R.C. also conceived the idea of meat judging contests in 1926, and we had a national contest that same year. Meat judging, too, is a significant part of our history and our current program.

We must know who we are and why we are here. The opening ceremony for our FFA chapter when I was in high school included the question: Future Farmers, why are we here? (To which every member in unison responded—To practice brotherhood, honor rural opportunity and responsibility, and to develop those qualities of leadership which a Future Farmer should possess.) Fellow members, we could ask ourselves the same question today. I would hope our answer could be found in the AMSA Mission Statement, approved just last year.

AMSA Mission: *To foster, through education and research, the discovery and application of sound scientific and technological principles of the meat sciences that will contribute to the betterment of human life.*

I suppose one could say that if you don’t buy this, then you shouldn’t be here. We have said that we exist as an association to foster the discovery and application of sound scientific and technological principles. Everything we do ought to address this issue, or we need to revise our mission. A clearer picture of what the association intends to do is given by our vision statement.

AMSA Vision: *The AMSA, as an independent, scientific organization, will be the primary source of credible, science-based information for all elements of the meat sciences. By working across disciplines and animal species, the AMSA will continue to be the premier professional society for those with careers associated with meats. Its members will lead education, research, technology transfer, public service and recognition activities, and its clientele will benefit from accurate, objective information.*

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Not too long ago, we had a very pragmatic graduate student at the University of Nebraska who always asked “why should I join the organization,” regardless of which organization we were discussing. He’s here today. After a while, it gets to be a tough question to answer. Because it makes you think hard and not rely on soft answers. More than once in the past year I’ve heard members comment about the benefits of membership. Even our own strategic plan, approved last year, includes the following statement:

... [A] dues increase program similar to the current program will be considered in 1997 but must be tied to improvements in services and benefits and which answer the question “what do members get for their dues?”

It is still a difficult question to address, not because there is no good answer, but because the answer depends on who you are, what you value, and your personal and professional perspective. I strongly support our mission and I truly believe we get our money’s worth. Our own members are perhaps the best to deliver this message. A video tape was put together to assist our fund-raising activities. On the video, members say the AMSA has a number of strengths including:

Technical Expertise—We are charged with the responsibility to translate science into workable, usable applications. We must work to discover and then to apply scientific and technological principles.

People—Our members are our number one asset. They possess a loyalty and personal commitment unmatched by any other scientific society. The strength of AMSA comes from their dedication and volunteer efforts. If anyone needs help with meat science, AMSA members or people trained by AMSA members are involved. Through our own leadership, we can bring “practically an army of people” to bear on solving problems for the meat industry.

Linkages—Linking of various industry segments, including industry, academia, and government, has been significant. Providing the opportunity to transfer to technology and to collectively solve problems is a hallmark of the AMSA. In short, we provide a “marvelous bridge” among segments so that networking and communication can occur. In the past year, we have worked especially hard to establish partnerships. This combining of talents has allowed effective solutions to be identified from a problem-solving approach.

Track Record—The AMSA has a long list of significant accomplishments. Our ability to deliver pertinent, current programs on time is well known. The history and legacy of the association and its members serve as a strong foundation on which to build our future.

Key Programs—We are progressive and conduct many worthwhile programs—the Meat Industry Research Conference, the Reciprocal Meat Conference, and Intercollegiate Meat Judging to name a few. Fact sheets, publications, and seminars help us to educate on such important issues as HACCP. In short, we are the translators of science to application. We perform critical functions like education and attraction of new minds into the field. We train the future leaders, and “put science to work.” It takes an association like

AMSA to have the foresight to identify problems before they show up in the media.

Clearly there are important benefits from AMSA membership. Perhaps a better way to present these benefits in a way others can relate is to evaluate the needs of our membership categories and to discuss key benefits in each case.

Industry—Our industry members are experiencing increasing pressure to enhance food safety. The magnitude of the impact of regulatory issues is great. We all share concerns of declining market share and consumer attitudes and confidence in our product. The successful path to the future cannot ignore the contribution of science and technology in providing ways to do what needs to be done. There is always a place for skilled, educated labor who can one day take over the leadership reins within a company. I’m sure there are more issues, but I trust you would agree that these are significant ones.

To these members, I would point to the variety of educational activities undertaken by AMSA. A plethora of short courses, ranging in topics from meat technology to HACCP to sanitation standard operating procedures are a good start. The availability of a scientific community from which individuals can be accessed for partnership in developing and applying technology is critical. And the quality individuals coming out of meat judging and graduate programs is well established. To paraphrase our president-elect, Dell Allen, almost any leader you see today in the industry is either an AMSA member or was trained by one. The AMSA also has addressed industry issues by preparing, for example, a white paper on advanced meat recovery systems. The Meat Industry Research Conference is a valuable source of information and updates on scientific topics.

Academic—University faculty are facing a greater demand for accountability and evidence that research, education, and extension programs are relevant. The value of networking and partnering with scientists from other academic societies and universities, coupled with the need for access to industry awareness and perceptions, is met by the activities of our organization. Keeping current in the broad topics of meat science are addressed by this very Reciprocal Meat Conference. The chance to be actively involved in national programs, either as a participant or as a leader, is offered through our association. Opportunities to enhance outreach and technology transfer occur as a result of the AMSA. And the meat judging program is a very effective way to entice students to learn more about the industry and support our graduate student programs. Input into research priorities and access to money for meat science programs are becoming more difficult to accomplish, yet the AMSA provides some this opportunity.

Student—The twin needs of networking (for both jobs and colleagues) and learning the scientific, technical side of the industry can be met through the American Meat Science Association. There are opportunities for paper presentations, competition posters, and to interact with other meat scientists at the Reciprocal Meat Conference. Many students take

advantage of short courses and educational activities. Experiencing different perspectives and the chance to engage in reciprocal discussions is a valuable part of learning.

Government—Networking and gaining access to the right people for information and assistance is needed. The AMSA offers “one-stop shopping” for people and information on meat. If targeted research is needed or credible scientific data or thought on issues of regulatory importance are wanted, AMSA members stand ready to assist.

Emeritus—Our emeriti members have a desire to maintain contact with colleagues and the field of meat science. AMSA membership provides just such an opportunity. Further, the desire to “give back” to the association is met with the need to retain a knowledge of the history of the AMSA and the origin of activities and events of significance. Membership, regardless of category, is definitely a win-win proposition, providing benefits to both the members and the collective whole of the organization.

It's useful to review this information as we again look to the strategic plan for future activities. Where DO we go from here?

Strategic Plan

Last year, our strategic plan identified several important actions that were needed. I'd like to take a moment to review them and to indicate where we are now on these issues.

- I. Approve the constitution and by-laws changes—done.
- II. Adopt the strategic plan—done.
- III. Implement the strategic plan:
 - A. Employment of Executive Director—done.
 - B. Establish a Business Office—done.
 - C. Implement a Sustaining Member Program—done.
 - D. Develop new relationships with the NCBA and NPPC—done.
 - E. Expand partnership programs—begun.
 - F. Aggressive growth of endowment program—begun.
 - G. Expand the short course program—begun.
 - H. Implement the AMSA Advisory Council—to begin this year.

I would refer you to the President's report for more information on each of these activities. As to the future, I base my projections on several presumptions:

1. There will always be a need for sound science, delivered with authority and credibility.
2. There is profound strength in partnering.
3. We must focus our activities—do what we do well.
4. The linkage of industry, academia, and government will always have value.
5. There is a definite need for multi-species programs.
6. The landscape will continue change—we must be flexible and adapt.

What does the future hold? It holds challenge, frustration, uncertainty, and turmoil. But out of this dynamic time can come opportunity, satisfaction, rewards, and vitality. It all depends on how we react. As we move toward an asso-

ciation with a broader focus—one with paid staff to complement the volunteers and a large measure of independence—there are a few opportunities to improve. We need faster response time, greater continuity, and of course financial stability. It is also critical that all of our members participate fully in the activities of the organization.

As many of you know, my daughters Carrie and Christie are cloggers. That vigorous dance developed in the Appalachian mountains as a blend of many influences. There are some elements of the Irish step dance in clogging, memorialized recently by the production Riverdance. A few years ago, my oldest daughter, Carrie, told me she wanted to dance a duet in competition. The problem was the dance Director had already selected people to do duets (the first ever by the club) and Carrie wasn't one of them. I tried to explain to her how difficult it would be to do one until the next year. It did not deter her. She learned the duet on her own, attending every practice and learning every move. When one of the other dancers faltered, the Director called Carrie for an audition and she did the duet in competition. A year later, she told me she wanted to teach clogging. How do you explain to a 12-year old child that it would be years before she could teach? It did not deter her. She put up a poster and started tutoring. Within six months, the Club Director asked her to help teach a class. Carrie now teaches four classes and directs her own exhibition team. From these experiences I've learned two things. One—don't tell Carrie she can't do something because she'll find a way to get it done. And Two—follow the Nike slogan—Just Do It. There is a lot to be said for working your way into a job. By this I mean that it's very difficult to know where we are headed. I believe that by doing the things we do and working toward our mission statement, we will be in a position to fulfill our vision. To do so requires some effort on everyone's part.

Our members must continue to be the aggressive volunteers that they are. We must all rededicate ourselves to the AMSA if we are to be around in 50 years. It would be fatal to turn it all over to an executive director and just walk away. Yet we must also make the transition from a totally volunteer organization with its inherent inefficiencies and time delays to having paid staff to help implement programs and decisions in a timely manner. The membership must respond to opportunities and requests—be it to lead or to compete. We must seek to more clearly articulate a vision of what we want to be and then aggressively work to get there.

In last year's strategic plan, Roger Mandigo and the long-range planning committee proposed a structure for the AMSA which included member services and industry services. Member services included the RMC, the MIRC, the directory, the newsletter, and job placement, to name a few. For industry services, we included programs like short courses and white papers, public education, meat judging, marketing technology, and slaughter/processing technology. I would suggest that there are many more opportunities to serve many other segments—retail, distribution, foodservice, and physicians. For example, are we doing all we could for packers,

processors, distributors, retailers, food service, and consumers? What about allied professionals? Our continuing education efforts have great potential. It's been suggested we could tap into our membership and provide valuable publications on a variety of technical topics. We ought to keep a close eye on opportunities to develop and deliver programs that meet the needs of these industry segments. Are there opportunities at the retail level for coordinated meat programs? To what extent do we address the needs of distributors? We do not want to compete with programs from the National Pork Producers Council and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (they are our partners), but where there is a void or a place where AMSA can better meet the needs of these industry segments, we ought to be there to *"foster, through education and research, the discovery and application of sound scientific and technological principles of the meat sciences."*

I imagine the AMSA of the future to be viewed as a critical source of information that is correct, unbiased, and sound. We will have a much expanded service program yet will directly serve our members by offering opportunities to become involved in many of the service areas. Such activity

will provide professional growth and stature and thus be considered a benefit of membership. We will become a more global organization, with dramatic growth in Mexico and Latin America. Our budgets will shift away from their current heavy reliance on checkoff dollars. Many of our core strengths will continue, like our technical expertise, volunteers and people, linkages, and existing programs like meat judging, the Reciprocal Meat Conference, and the Meat Industry Research Conference. These will be augmented by many other targeted workshops, seminars, and short courses. We have the opportunity to enhance our position as the educational arm of the industry. As our linkages and partnerships expand, we will become more involved in current issues and will be expected to respond quickly to issues in a timely, credible manner.

Although it's important that we engage in such discussion, it is also critical that we not lose sight of delivering on our commitments and taking care of the daily business of operating the American Meat Science Association. Thomas Carlyle once said *"Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand."* I could not agree more.