

## FINDINGS: About This Study

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### About The Survey

This Internet survey of Student, Active, and Emeritus members was conducted on behalf of the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA) to better understand their characteristics, preferences, needs, and suggestions for the Society. It was conducted by MemberSurvey.com (division of Readex Research), an independent research firm. Survey content was designed jointly by SSSA and MemberSurvey.com. Survey web site development, data collection, analysis, and reporting were handled by MemberSurvey.com.

The web-based survey was conducted in conjunction with related member surveys for SSSA's sister societies, the American Society of Agronomy (ASA) and the Crop Science Society of America (CSSA). Because there is substantial overlap in membership between the three Tri-Societies, a stratified joint sampling plan was constructed to achieve acceptable representation of each society's Active, Emeritus, and Student members, without asking any individual to complete more than one survey.

Data was collected via the Internet between August 23 and September 26, 2005, at which time a total of 1,000 usable responses for the SSSA survey had been received, representing 30% of the 3,291 individuals invited to participate. Because a substantial portion of invited members did not respond, the possible effects of nonresponse bias should be considered. In particular, comparisons of survey response with known member data suggest these results somewhat over-represent Active members (especially journal subscribers) and PhDs, and somewhat under-represent SSSA's oldest/Emeritus members.

From all SSSA responses, a random sample of 600 responses was selected for processing and analysis. Data are weighted in tabulation to restore correct proportionality between responses used and population segment sizes. Percentages based on all 600 responses are subject to a margin of error of  $\pm 3.8\%$  at the 95% confidence level. Percentages calculated on smaller tabulation bases — for example, international members — are subject to more statistical variability.

### About This Report

This initial *Findings* section provides a narrative summary of key survey results, with selected comparisons between important segments of the population. It ends with a brief set of conclusions and recommendations.

The *Tables* section of the report presents two complete sets of survey results: one set broken out by renewal likelihood, overall satisfaction, membership type, membership tenure, and Tri-Society memberships; the other by location, education, experience, and work setting.

The *Comments* section includes complete verbatim reproductions of respondents' answers, in their own words, to the survey's open-ended questions.

The *Appendix* provides additional details of survey methodology, as well as a copy of the survey instrument itself.

This report was prepared for SSSA by MemberSurvey.com in accordance with accepted research standards and practices. This report contains all survey results that were provided to SSSA.

## FINDINGS: Member Profile

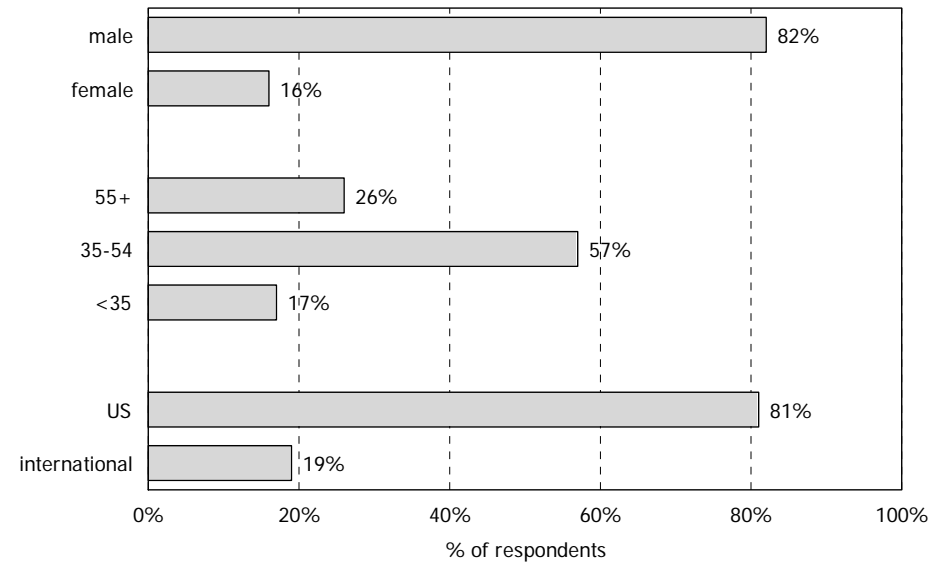
This survey represents the estimated 5,402 Student, Active, and Emeritus members ("members") of the Soil Science Society of America (SSSA), who constitute 53% of all members of the Tri-Societies: SSSA, the American Society of Agronomy (ASA), and the Crop Science Society of America (CSSA).

82% of members are male, and 16% female (2% did not answer). All responding Emeritus members are male; 82% of Active and 76% of Student members are male [TABLE 113].

Median age for SSSA members is 48, the youngest of the Tri-Societies, with 26% being 55 or older, and 17% under the age of 35 [TABLE 114].

81% of SSSA members are located in the United States, with the greatest concentration in the South (31%). 4% are located in Canada, and another 15% in international locations outside the US and Canada — the highest proportion among the Tri-Societies [TABLE 121]. 42% of Emeritus members are located outside the US. Results are broken out by location in the *Tables*.

## Member Characteristics



base: 600 SSSA members

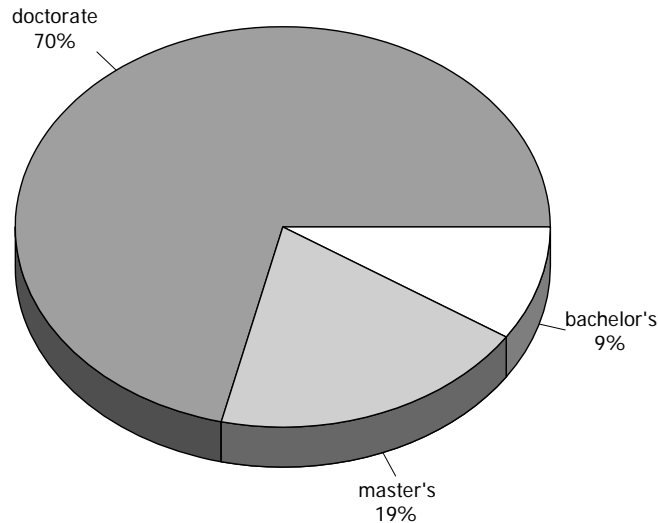
## FINDINGS: Member Profile

70% of SSSA members hold a doctorate as their highest degree earned, 19% have a master's (or equivalent), and 9% a bachelor's (or equivalent)

[TABLE 108]. International members are much more likely to hold a doctorate than others (89% to 66%). Over a third of those holding a master's (37%) are Student members, presumably doctoral students. Looked at from a different angle, 55% of SSSA Student members are master's prepared, and an additional 29% already hold a doctorate. Master's prepared members are the youngest of SSSA members, with a median age of 39. Results are broken out by education in the *Tables*.

### Education

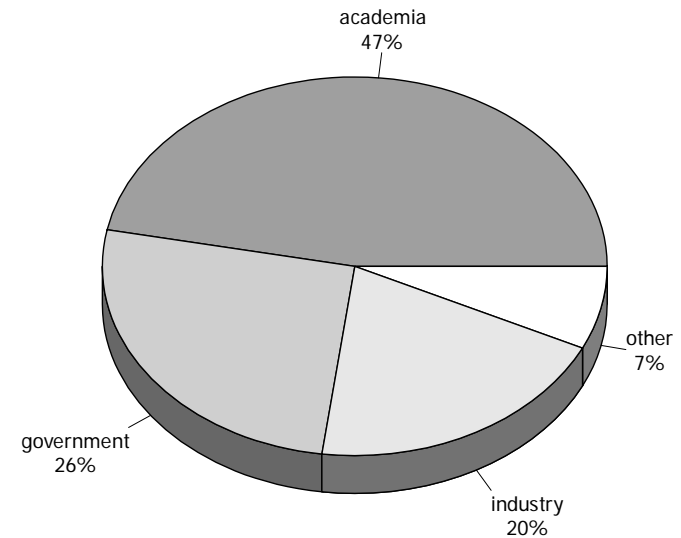
#### Highest Degree Earned



base: 600 SSSA members

SSSA members work in a variety of settings [TABLE 110]. 47% work in academia (including land grant universities, other public and private colleges/universities); 26% work in a government agency, the largest percentage of the Tri-Societies; 20% in industry and/or private practice/consulting; and 7% in other settings (including students and retired). Those holding a doctorate as their highest degree are most likely to be employed in academia; those with a master's or bachelor's are more likely to work in industry. Results are broken out by setting in the *Tables*.

### Work Setting



base: 600 SSSA members

The median member reports 22 years of experience in the profession, with those outside the US and/or employed in industry somewhat more experienced than others [TABLE 109]. Results are broken out by experience in the *Tables*.

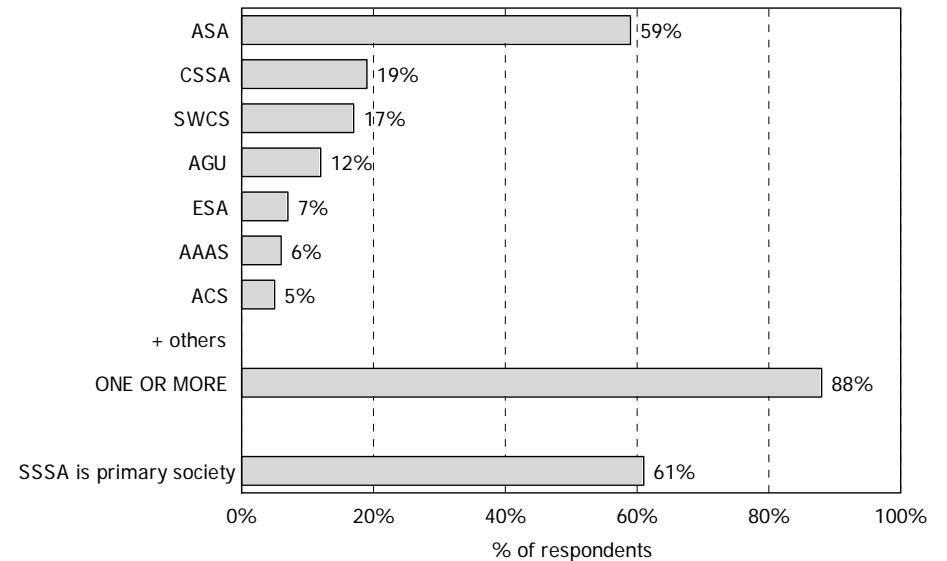
## FINDINGS: Member Profile

By respondents' reports, 59% of SSSA members are also members of American Society of Agronomy (ASA); according to member file data, 65% of SSSA members also belong to ASA [TABLES 111, 119]. Respondents report that 19% are CSSA members, which tallies closely with the 20% recorded in member file data. Results are broken out by sister society membership in the *Tables*.

Other national/international professional or scientific societies to which substantial fractions of SSSA members also belong include SWCS (Soil and Water Conservation Society, 17%); AGU (American Geophysical Union, 12%); ESA (Ecological Society of America, 7%); AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science, 6%); and ACS (American Chemical Society, 5%). Altogether, 88% of SSSA members indicate belonging to one or more additional professional or scientific societies [TABLE 111].

61% of members consider SSSA to be their *primary* scientific society [TABLE 112]. This proportion is highest among SSSA's most veteran members (20+ years of membership) and US members. 65% of those who are not members of either ASA or CSSA consider SSSA to be primary, while 60% of those who are also members of either ASA and/or CSSA also name SSSA. 9% of respondents overall name ASA as their primary society, the most frequently mentioned alternative to SSSA.

## Other Professional Memberships



base: 600 SSSA members (multiple answers)

## FINDINGS: SSSA Membership

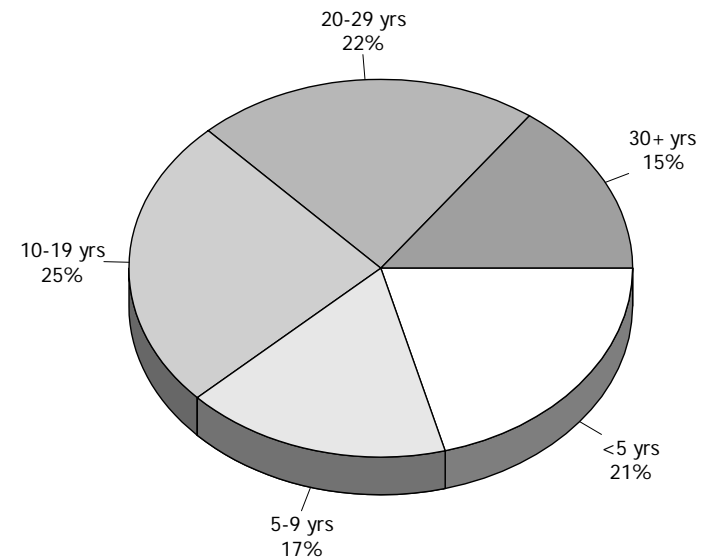
The typical (median) SSSA member has been a member of the Society for 15 years, including 15% who have been members for 30 years or more, as well as an additional 22% belonging for 20 to 29 years [TABLE 001]. 21% of SSSA members have belonged for less than five years. These early years of membership are sometimes considered a "trial" phase, in which assessments of affinity and membership value are still being worked out, with consequently higher rates of non-renewal; as such, this is typically a segment that bears monitoring. Results are broken out by membership tenure in the *Tables*.

PhD members have belonged to SSSA for an average of 8.5 years more than master's prepared members, and 7.0 years more than bachelor's prepared members.

64% of represented members are Active with a journal, with 19% Active with no journal. 13% are Students, and 4% Emeritus [TABLE 118].

77% of SSSA members pay all of their annual membership fee themselves, the largest percentage of the Tri-Societies, while 12% have complete organizational support, and 6% have research grants pay for membership. Those in government are most likely to have to pay themselves (94%), followed by those in academia (78%), then those in industry (57%). Virtually all Students (95%) pay for themselves [TABLE 009].

## Membership Tenure



base: 600 SSSA members

## FINDINGS: SSSA Membership

The number one reason given by SSSA members for both initially joining and subsequently renewing their SSSA memberships is "to stay informed on developments in the field" (74% for both joining and for renewing).

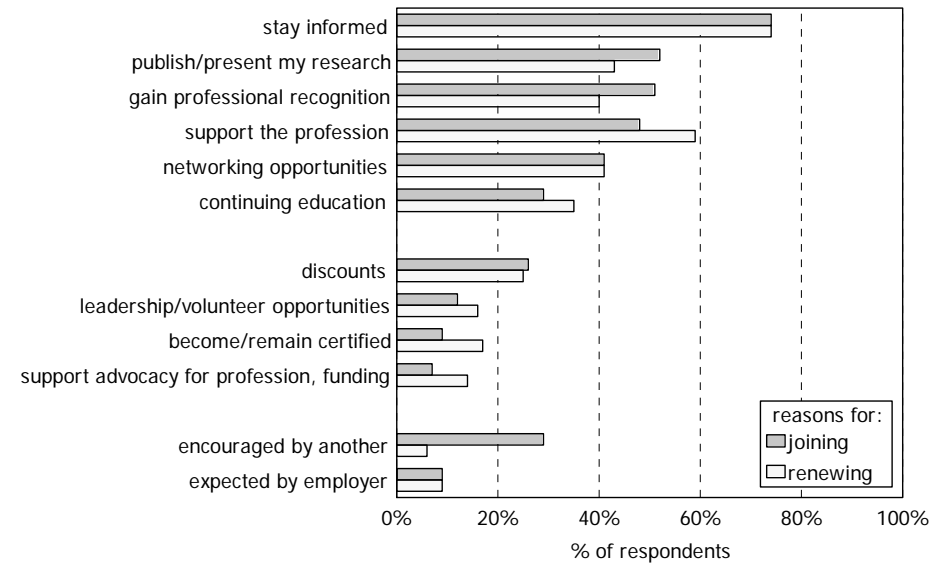
Publishing/presenting my own research is next (52%/43%), followed by gaining professional recognition and visibility (51%/40%). Supporting the profession rises from 48% as a reason for joining to 59% as a reason for renewing [TABLES 002, 003].

Staying informed is of special importance to bachelor's prepared members, and to those working in industry. Publishing/presenting research is of course more important than average for PhDs and academics; gaining professional recognition and visibility follows that same pattern.

Networking opportunities, cited by around 40% overall, are of special interest to US Students and those in academia. Continuing education (~32% overall) is of special interest to those employed in industry. Becoming or remaining certified is cited by 17% of SSSA members as a reason to renew, concentrated among those employed in industry. Discounts on journals, books, and Annual Meetings fees (~25%) are rated more highly by SSSA members than by members of the sister societies.

Encouragement by another is a powerful incentive to try SSSA membership (29%), but counts for little in the renewal decision (6%).

## Reasons For Joining/Renewing



base: 600 SSSA members (multiple answers)

## FINDINGS: SSSA Membership

The primary ways members have been involved with SSSA in the last two years revolve around media [TABLE 004]. 84% indicated visiting the Society web site; 84% reading *CSANews* (a monthly newsletter); 71% reading *News Flash* (a biweekly email newsletter). 69% indicated they subscribed to one or more Tri-Societies journals, highest of the three societies; 30% said they published research in one or more of the journals, and 37% reviewed manuscripts. 38% said they have purchased books, monographs, CD-ROMs, and/or special publications in the last two years.

An impressive 56%, again highest of the Tri-Societies, attended one or both of the Annual Meetings held in the last two years. The proportion attending is even higher among PhDs and SSSA's veteran members; it is significantly lower among those outside the US (26%); bachelor's prepared members (39%); those in industry (37%); and Emeritus members (39%).

43% overall presented at one or more Annual Meetings in the last two years, and 41% also reported visiting Annual Meeting trade show exhibits.

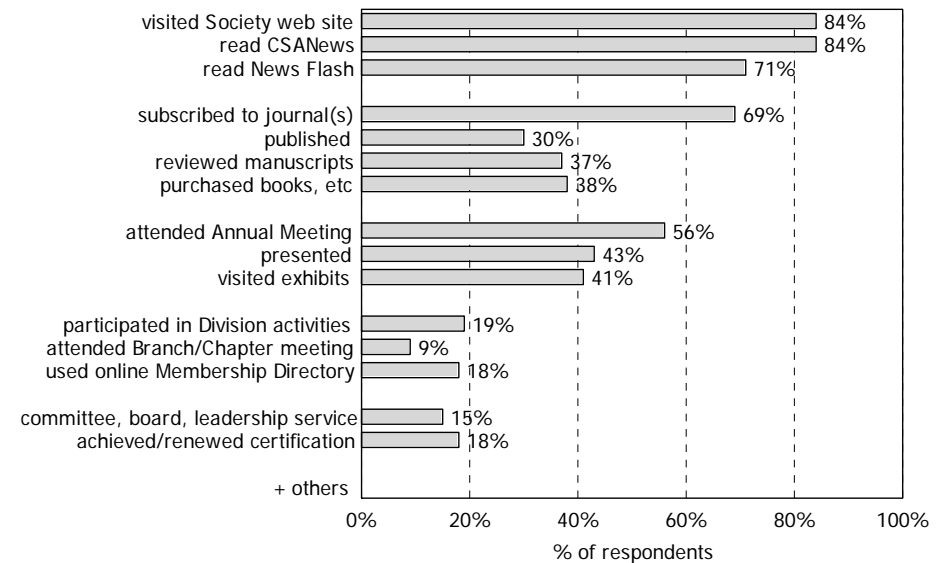
19% said they participated in Division activities (lowest of the Tri-Societies), while only 9% indicated attending a Branch or Chapter meeting. 18% used the online Membership Directory. 15% served on a committee, an editorial board, a board of directors, or in a Division leadership position (lowest of the Tri-Societies); such service is more likely among US veteran members and PhDs in academia, and very unlikely among Student and novice (less than five years' tenure) members, those in industry, and those outside the US.

18% indicated achieving or renewing a certification, concentrated among non-PhDs and those working in industry.

Other areas of involvement cited by fewer than one in six members (not shown) include submitting or receiving an award nomination; reading the Annual Report; donating to the Agronomic Science Foundation; subscribing to *Science Policy Report* or *Science in Action*; and posting a resume online in the Career Placement Center.

### Society Involvement

Last 2 Years



base: 600 SSSA members (multiple answers)

## FINDINGS: SSSA Membership

The survey delved somewhat more deeply with respect to a few areas of involvement. 85% of respondents reported they are currently members of one or more SSSA Divisions [TABLE 005], though member records indicate that virtually all are recorded as members of at least one [TABLE 125]. Note the fairly substantial gap between 85% claiming Division membership and only 19% indicating participation in Division activities the last two years.

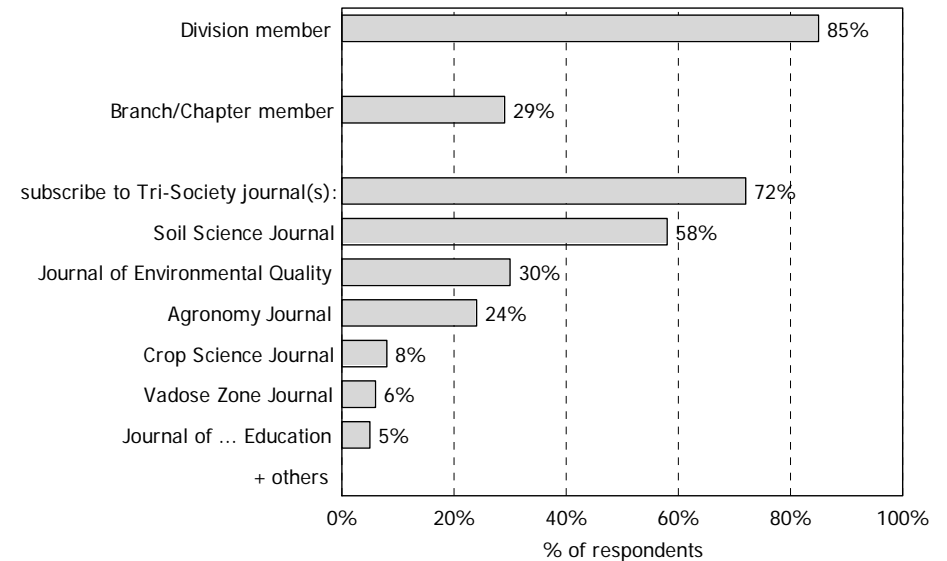
Divisions designated *primary* by at least one in ten acknowledged Division members include S-3 Soil Biology & Biochemistry; S-4 Soil Fertility & Plant Nutrition; S-5 Pedology; S-6 Soil & Water Management & Conservation; and S-11 Soils & Environmental Quality [TABLE 006].

29% reported membership in one or more SSSA Branches and/or Chapters, led by the North Central Branch (9%) and the Southern Branch (9%) [TABLE 008]. Again noteworthy is the substantial gap between 29% claiming membership and only 9% indicating attendance at a Branch or Chapter meeting in last two years.

Respondent journal subscription results are based on member file data, and show that 58% of SSSA members subscribe to the Society's flagship *Soil Science Journal* [TABLE 126]. PhDs and SSSA's most veteran members post higher subscription rates.

30% of SSSA members subscribe to *Journal of Environmental Quality*. 24% subscribe to *Agronomy Journal*, 8% to *Crop Science Journal*, 6% to *Vadose Zone Journal*, and 5% to *Journal of Natural Resources & Life Sciences Education*. Subscriptions to other Tri-Societies journals were reported by 4% or fewer.

## Involvement Specifics



base: 600 SSSA members (multiple answers)



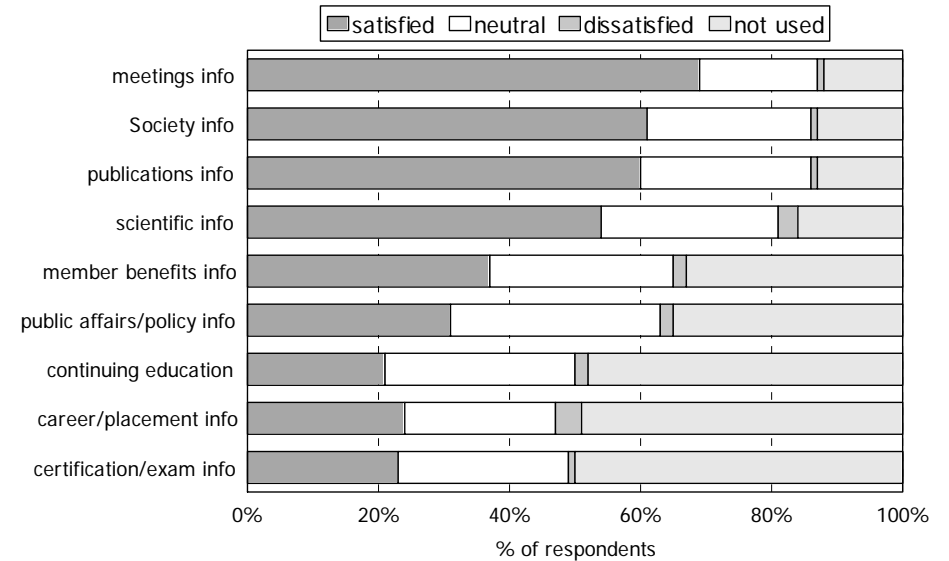
## FINDINGS: SSSA Membership

Finally, several questions probed use of and satisfaction with the SSSA web site ([www.soils.org](http://www.soils.org)). About one in four members (26%) visits the site at least weekly, highest among the Tri-Societies; however, 26% say they visit "rarely" and 6% have not visited at all [TABLE 042]. These results correlate to a marked extent with age/experience/Emeritus status.

Asked to rate satisfaction with the web site for providing various types of information (or to indicate that such information is not used), web site visitors are favorable in their evaluations: virtually no overt dissatisfaction is expressed in any area [TABLES 043-045]. 69% are satisfied with meetings information, with only 1% dissatisfied (and 12% not using); 61% with Society information (1% dissatisfied, 13% not using); 60% with publications information (1% dissatisfied, 13% not using); and 54% with scientific information (3% dissatisfied, 16% not using).

Proportions not using some other types of information on the web site include about half of visitors: continuing education/CEUs (48%); career/placement information (49%); and certification/exam information (50%).

### Web Site Use



base: 556 web site visitors

## FINDINGS: Society Benefits

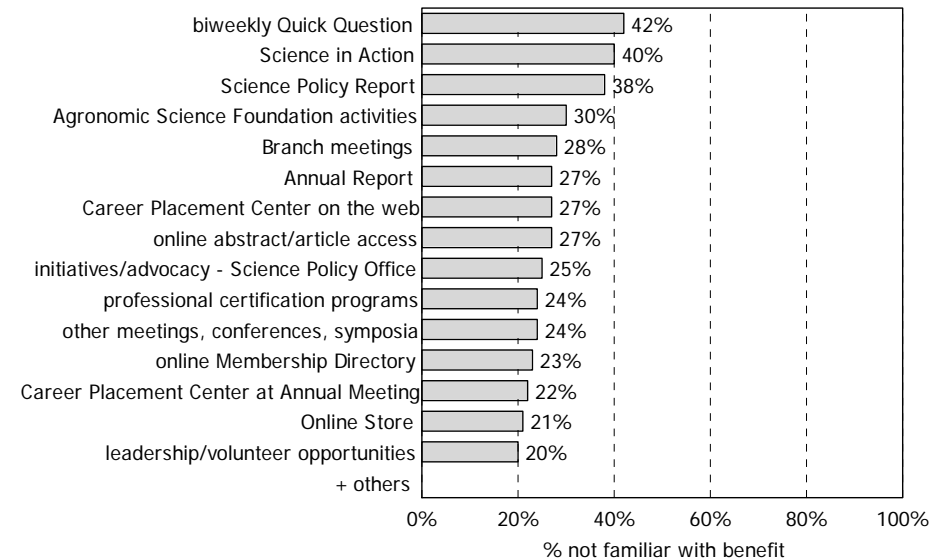
A substantial portion of the survey was devoted to understanding awareness of, importance of, and satisfaction with the 28 programs, products, services, resources, and opportunities currently offered as benefits of SSSA membership. Respondents were asked to answer two questions with respect to each:

- 1) How important is each offering to you as a benefit of SSSA membership?  
(0 to 4 scale; 0 = not at all important, 4 = extremely important, plus "not familiar with")
- 2) For those you are familiar with, how satisfied are you with SSSA's performance in providing those offerings?  
(-2 to +2 scale; -2 = very dissatisfied, +2 = very satisfied)

One of the challenges faced by many societies is making sure that members are fully aware of the whole range of benefits offered through membership, a special challenge when the list of benefits is long (as it is here), and for newer members (including Students) who have not had as much exposure to communications and activities. In this context, results which show between a fifth and nearly half of SSSA members unfamiliar with some key benefits — many of them relatively new to the benefits bundle — are not unexpected [TABLE 010]. Proportions indicating unfamiliarity are ten to twenty points higher among novice members (less than five years tenure) than among veteran members (20+ years) for many items.

To ensure that members are fully appreciative of the whole "benefits" side of the cost/benefit evaluation, efforts should be made to reduce the highest levels of unfamiliarity, especially among newer members.

### Unfamiliar Society Benefits



base: 600 SSSA members (multiple answers)

## FINDINGS: Society Benefits

Benefits rated "important" (i.e., 3 or 4 on the 0 to 4 scale) by the largest proportions of SSSA members include the web site; *CSANews*; the journals; books, monographs, CD-ROMs, etc; and the Annual Meeting. Also rated important by a quarter or more of members overall are:

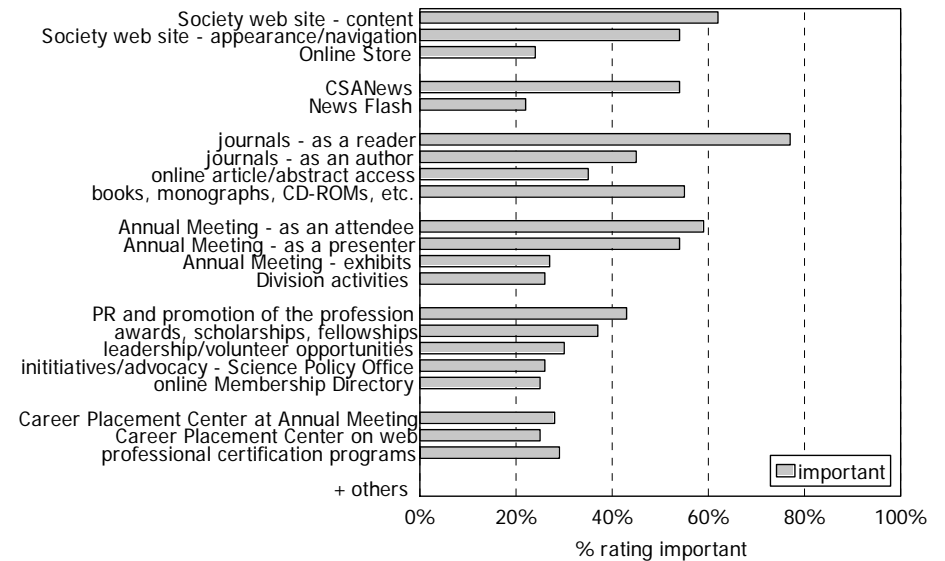
- Division activities (26%)
- public relations and promotion of the profession (43%)
- awards, scholarships, fellowships (37%)
- leadership/volunteer opportunities (30%)
- science policy initiatives and advocacy through Science Policy Office (26%)
- online Membership Directory (25%)
- Career Placement Center at Annual Meeting (28%)
- Career Placement Center on the web (25%)
- professional certification programs (29%)

Benefits rated important by relatively few SSSA members include Agronomic Science Foundation activities; Branch meetings; *Science Policy Report* (though recall relatively high levels of unfamiliarity); *Science in Action* (ditto); the Annual Report; and the biweekly Quick Question (unfamiliar to 42%) [TABLE 011].

Tri-Societies journals and the Annual Meeting are of special importance to PhDs and those in academia or government; they are less important to bachelor's prepared members, and those in industry. Online resources (the web site, online article/abstract access, *News Flash*) are especially valued by younger members, as are career placement offerings.

## Evaluation of Society Benefits

### Importance



base: 600 SSSA members (multiple answers)

## FINDINGS: Society Benefits

For most of the high-importance benefits just discussed, the percentage rating themselves satisfied (i.e., +1 or +2 on the -2 to +2 scale) very closely approximates the percentage rating important: the desired outcome in a standard "gap analysis" [TABLE 012].

Further, overt levels of dissatisfaction (-1 or -2) are very low overall and for all studied segments [TABLE 013]. Combined, these two results are an endorsement of the success SSSA has in delivering its current benefits bundle for members.

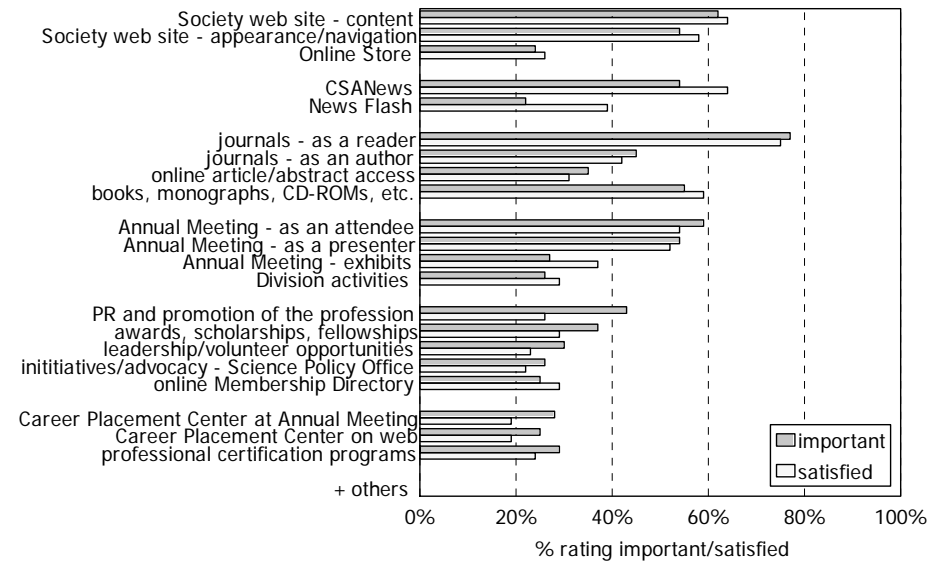
The gap analysis does, however, point out three areas which might merit additional exploration, or at least ongoing monitoring. There is a 17 point gap between importance and satisfaction (43%/26%) for public relations and promotion of the profession; the gap is most acute for US members (49%/28%) and for master's prepared members (51%/25%). Many respondents commented that a major challenge facing the profession is the declining number entering the profession, and many see public relations and promotion as the necessary response (see *Comments*).

An 8 point gap (37%/29%) is observed for awards, scholarships, and fellowships; the gap is somewhat larger for non-PhDs, those newest to the field, and Student members.

Finally, gaps of nine and six points are seen for the Career Placement Center at the Annual Meeting and on the web. Discontent here is highest among master's prepared members, those newest to the field, Student members, those newest to the Society, and those who are not also members of ASA and/or CSSA. (Note there is much overlap between these segments.)

## Evaluation of Society Benefits

Importance + Satisfaction



base: 600 SSSA members (multiple answers)

## FINDINGS: Overall Evaluations

The survey included a number of questions seeking high-level evaluations of various attributes, as well as questions designed to capture "bottom-line" sentiments regarding SSSA. One item asked respondents to rate their agreement/disagreement with a series of statements about SSSA, using a -2 to +2 scale where -2 = strongly disagree and +2 = strongly agree. The chart shows the percentage disagreeing (-2, -1) and the percentage agreeing (+1, +2); not shown are those rating the item neutral (0) or not rating it [TABLES 089, 090].

SSSA members are most strongly in agreement with, and least likely to disagree with, the statement that "through SSSA, members can make a positive contribution to the industry, the profession, and society." There is virtually no disagreement with the statement "the SSSA staff is responsive to my emails/phone calls."

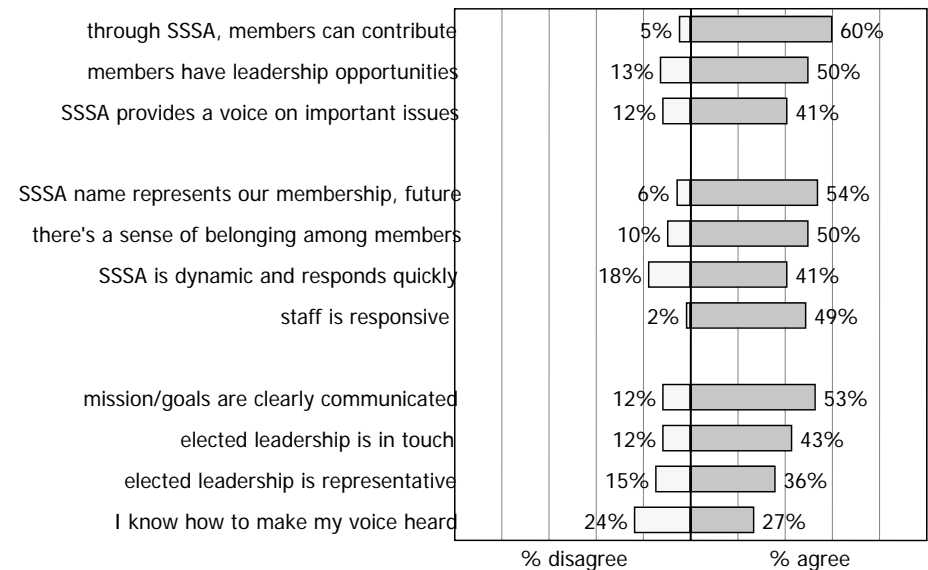
Around half agree, and between 6% and 13% disagree, with each of these statements:

- Members have access and opportunities to serve in leadership positions.
- SSSA provides members a voice regarding important issues that affect them.
- The SSSA name represents our membership and our future.
- There is a strong sense of belonging among members of SSSA.
- SSSA's mission and goals are clearly communicated and understood.
- The Society's elected leadership is in touch with and responsive to challenges facing my profession.

Statements with the lowest levels of agreement and highest levels of disagreement include:

- SSSA is a dynamic organization that responds quickly to the changing needs of the profession.
- The Society's elected leadership is representative of the membership (in terms of ethnicity, profession, gender, age, etc.).
- I know how to make my voice heard with SSSA's leaders.

### Opinions About the Society



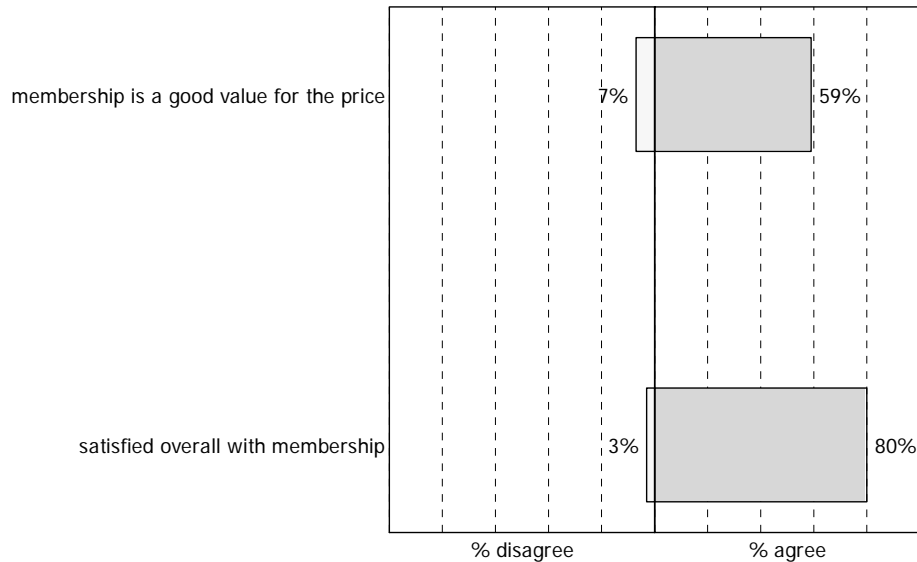
base: 600 SSSA members

## FINDINGS: Overall Evaluations

Using that same agree/disagree scale, respondents were asked to respond to the statement "SSSA membership is a good value for the price." 59% overall agree, 27% are neutral, and only 7% disagree [TABLE 102]. Value ratings are somewhat higher for Students and international members than for others.

A -2 to +2 scale was also used for respondents to rate their overall satisfaction with SSSA membership (as before). Here a Tri-Societies-best 80% overall rate themselves satisfied (+1 or +2), 15% neutral (0), and 3% dissatisfied (-1, -2) [TABLE 103]. Satisfaction ratings are also somewhat higher for Students and international members than for others. (Results are broken out by overall satisfaction in the Tables.)

### Value and Satisfaction

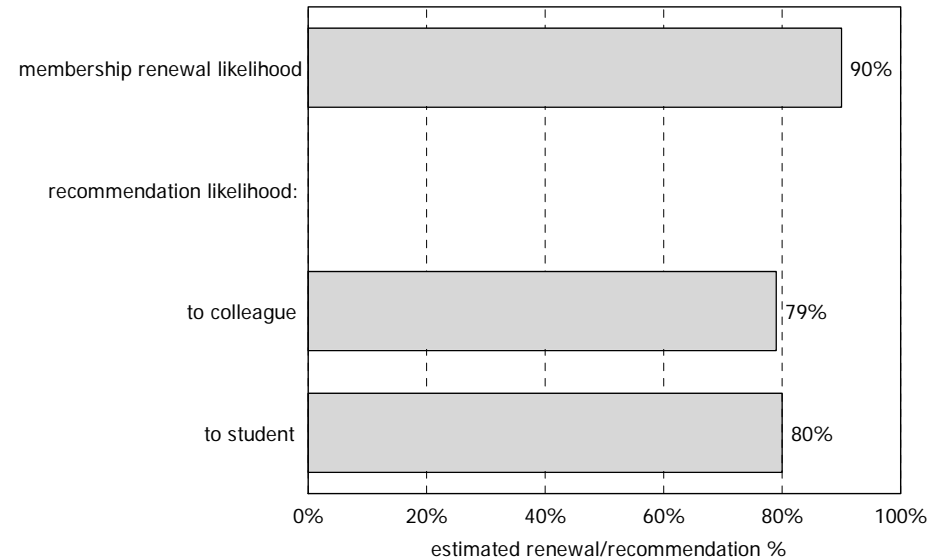


base: 600 SSSA members

Three additional bottom-line measures asked the likelihood of members renewing or recommending membership [TABLES 104-106]. Each used an 11-point scale where = 0 definitely will (would) not and 10 = definitely will (would); by rescaling to 0-100, the mean can be interpreted as a likelihood.

Using this approach, survey data estimate a 90% combined renewal rate for SSSA's Student, Active, and Emeritus members, highest of the three sister societies. 79% would recommend SSSA membership to a *colleague*, and 80% of those in a position to do so would recommend SSSA membership to a *student*.

### Renewal/Recommendation Likelihood



base: 600 SSSA members

All of these bottom-line measures — value, satisfaction, renewal/ recommendation likelihood — exhibit high levels of correlation with one another.

## FINDINGS: Overall Evaluations

One important use of such bottom-line measures is to understand how evaluations differ (if at all) for key membership segments. Focusing on the renewal likelihood measure, we recall that an estimated 90% of SSSA members as a whole will renew their memberships when they next come due [TABLE 104]. There is marked variation, however, by membership type: Students 86%, Active 90%, and Emeritus 99%.

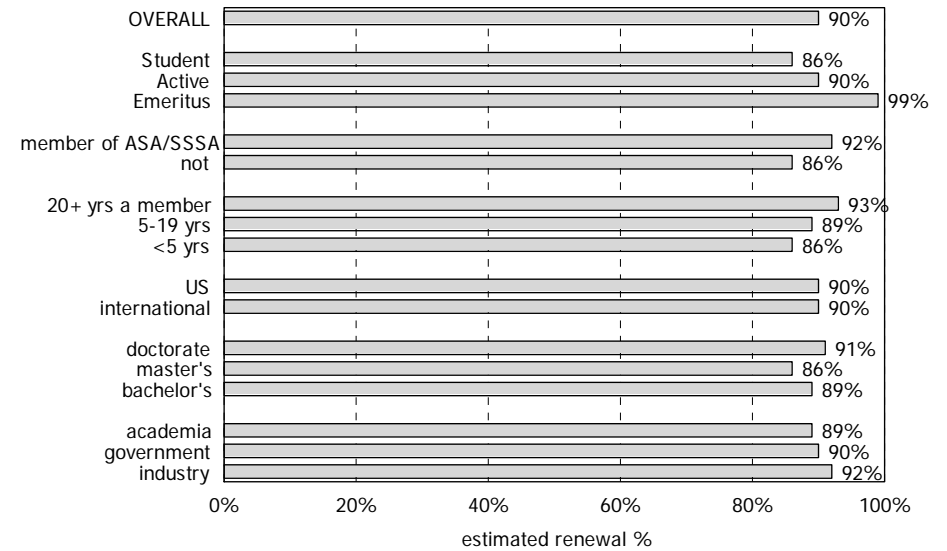
There is also a sizable gap between those who are also members of ASA and/or CSSA, and those who are members of SSSA only — 92% versus 86%.

The often-observed phenomenon that "trial" members (first five years) are significantly more at risk of defection is seen to some degree in these data, with SSSA's newest members likely to renew at an 86% rate, compared with 93% among its most veteran members.

There is virtually no difference observed in renewal intention between US and international members, an area frequently in tension for professional and scientific societies.

Results by education are mixed, with master's prepared members exhibiting the lowest renewal likelihood, and PhDs the highest. Finally, there is relatively little distinction in renewal likelihood by work setting.

## Renewal Likelihood By Segment



base: 600 SSSA members

## FINDINGS: Improving Value

What can be done to improve value perceptions, satisfaction, and renewal/recommendation likelihood, especially in those segments considered most at risk (Students/master's prepared members, novice members)? Some gains might be achieved to the extent unfamiliarity with SSSA's benefits can be reduced; recall that the novice member group, in particular, exhibited elevated levels of unfamiliarity with many.

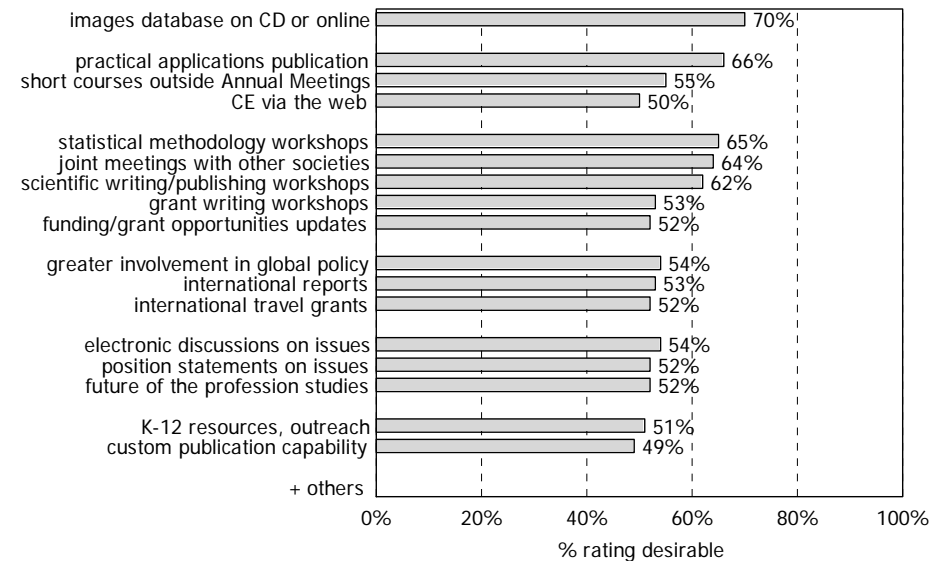
Similarly, gains may be found in addressing the satisfaction gaps associated with PR/promotion of the profession, awards/scholarships/fellowships, and the Career Placement Center (at Annual Meeting and on the web).

It is also important to anticipate future needs where possible. One approach to this is to present a number of proposed programs, products, services, and initiatives that might be offered or developed, and see which have the greatest appeal, either across all members or to segments of special interest. This chart recaps the results of such an exercise, showing the percentage rating each item "desirable" (i.e., +1 or +2 on a -2 to +2 scale where -2 = highly undesirable and +2 = highly desirable). 17 of the top offerings (of 30 possibilities) are shown [TABLE 055].

Of greatest interest to members as a whole are an images database on CD and/or online (70% rated desirable) and a publication featuring practical applications (66%). The images database has broad appeal across all segments; a practical publication has special appeal in the US and for those outside academia.

Short courses/workshops outside of Annual Meetings was selected by 55% overall, with interest higher among non-PhDs, non-academics, Student members, and novice members. Continuing education programs via the web was named by 50% overall, with few variations across segments.

## Desirable Prospective Offerings



base: 600 SSSA members (multiple answers)

The next cluster of highly desirable prospective offerings tends to appeal especially to Students and more educated members, also those in academia or government:

- statistical methodology workshops
- joint meetings with other societies
- scientific writing/publishing workshops
- grant writing workshops
- frequent funding/grant opportunities updates

Greater involvement in global policy, international perspectives/activities reports, and international travel grants/scholarships appeal especially to international members.



## FINDINGS: Improving Value

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About half expressed interest in offerings related to current issues and future directions:

- electronic discussions on current/controversial issues
- position statements on current issues
- future of the profession studies

A K-12 education and teaching resources/outreach program, and the ability to create a customized book or teaching aid from chapters in current publications, each appeal to about half, the former more strongly in the US, the latter more strongly among academics and those outside the US.

One possibility asked about only on the SSSA survey was the option of holding independent SSSA meetings. 30% of respondents overall rate this desirable; 37% of those not members of either ASA or CSSA support the idea.

### Respondent Comments

Two open-ended items also attempted to gauge unmet member needs:

- 1) What could the Soil Science Society of America do differently or provide that would most improve the value of membership for you?
- 2) What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the profession? What could a society like SSSA do to help meet those challenges?

Respondent comments were reviewed and categorized; the tabulated results may be found in TABLE 107 and TABLES 115-116.

As is typical with open-ended items, large proportions of respondents did not reply, and no single category is mentioned with high frequency — concerns expressed are highly various. In terms of suggestions for improving value, offering more and better online access to information is mentioned relatively frequently by Students and those in industry; reducing fees and costs is of elevated concern to international members, as is providing more encouragement/opportunities for international members.

In terms of biggest challenges, top mentions include attracting/maintaining Society membership; attracting students/young people to the profession; increasing public awareness/interest/support; strengthening university programs; and combating insufficient research funding. PR, promotion, and advocacy by the Society, along with collaborations with other societies and disciplines, are most often prescribed as remedies.

The real value of respondent comments lies more in understanding the specific ways in which concerns are expressed, and perhaps in the occasional one-off idea that might prove valuable (but has not yet been widely considered). Verbatim transcriptions of the responses in the *Comments* section may well repay study.

## FINDINGS: Conclusions and Recommendations

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This section calls out some conclusions and offers recommendations from the point of view of SSSA's members, as represented by this data. It does not take into account the Society's goals and objectives on the one hand, nor its constraints and mandates on the other. Hopefully these ideas will prove helpful to leadership as discussion-starters.

1. Given favorable ratings for value (59% agree membership is a good value, only 7% disagree), satisfaction (80% satisfied overall, 3% dissatisfied) and renewal likelihood (90% average rating), it seems clear that SSSA fundamentally succeeds in balancing the diverse needs and interests of its varied membership. The main conclusion to be drawn from these data is that SSSA should generally keep doing what it has been doing, making only minor adjustments at the margins of what it offers to members.
2. Within SSSA membership as a whole, certain segments evaluate membership somewhat less favorably: Student members, master's prepared members (many of whom are Students), and novice members (members for fewer than five years). All of these groups have somewhat lower levels of awareness of benefits offered, and somewhat lower rates of involvement with the Society. Extra efforts to inform, engage, and cater to these segments may help improve overall membership retention.
3. The primary benefits of SSSA membership, which should form the cornerstone of SSSA's member recruitment and retention communications, include:
  - staying informed on developments in the field
  - publishing/presenting research
  - networking opportunities
  - continuing education
  - supporting the profession
  - gaining professional recognition and visibility
4. Similarly, products and services of value to the largest numbers are those that should be highlighted in recruitment and post-purchase reinforcement communications, and sufficiently supported with resources to allow continued highly satisfactory delivery. These include:
  - the web site
  - *CSANews*
  - the journals
  - books, monographs, CD-ROMs, special publications
  - the Annual Meeting
5. Two offerings rated relatively high for importance appear to leave some room for improvement in member satisfaction: public relations and promotion of the profession, and awards, scholarships, and fellowships. Both offerings are of particular importance to SSSA's at-risk groups (Students, master's prepared members, novices). Additional exploration about the nature of these shortfalls, or at least ongoing monitoring, appear called for.
6. The Career Placement Center (at the Annual Meeting and on the web) also showed small importance/satisfaction gaps, also primarily with those same segments. Investigation and improvement should be considered.

## FINDINGS: Conclusions and Recommendations

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7. A potential trouble spot is high levels of unfamiliarity for many of the products and services offered as part of SSSA membership. Four are unknown to three in ten members or more: biweekly Quick Question, *Science in Action*, *Science Policy Report*, and Agronomic Science Foundation activities. A number of others which are of importance to at least a quarter of members are also unknown to 20%-27% of members:

- Career Placement Center (at Annual Meeting, on the web)
- online abstract and article access via Highwire
- science policy initiatives and advocacy through Science Policy Office
- professional certification programs
- online Membership Directory
- leadership/volunteer opportunities

In an overcommunicated environment, it can be hard to build awareness; to the extent SSSA considers some of these more unfamiliar offerings to be truly key benefits, it may need to increase efforts to make all members aware of them.

8. Offerings found of value by relatively low proportions of members might be reviewed for their continued relevance and contribution to the association's prosperity. These include:

- Branch meetings (only 29% say they are members, only 9% participated in last two years)
- the Annual Report
- *Science in Action*
- *Science Policy Report*
- biweekly Quick Question

9. Effectiveness of the Divisions might be reviewed. While all SSSA members are nominally members of one or more Divisions, only 85% believe themselves to be, only 26% rate them an important benefit of membership, and only 19% participated in Division activities in the last two years. No single SSSA division is considered primary by more than about one in ten members.

10. Be alert to (and responsive to, as possible) these member concerns:

- the Society's leadership being representative of membership (in terms of ethnicity, profession, gender, age, etc.)
- the Society being a dynamic organization that responds quickly to the changing needs of the profession
- members wanting to know how to make their voices heard with Society leaders

11. To enhance member value, consider adding one or more of these highly desired prospective offerings to the membership benefits bundle:

- an images database on CD and/or online
- a publication featuring practical applications
- statistical methodology workshops
- scientific writing/publishing workshops
- joint meetings with other societies

A number of other prospective offerings also tested positively, some with differential appeal to at-risk segments: these should also be considered for addition to the bundle.

12. Data do not appear to support moving to independent SSSA meetings, another possibility tested.

13. Concern about keeping the profession viable was a major theme in the relatively sparse respondent comments, with public relations, promotion, and advocacy on behalf of the profession and its funding urged as appropriate SSSA responses. Although the incidence of these concerns is hard to gauge from a qualitative survey item, echoes of this concern are noted in other survey items as well. This is an area SSSA may well want to investigate further and engage more aggressively with.

## FINDINGS: Conclusions and Recommendations

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14. To keep the Society on course, SSSA should continue periodic efforts such as this one to listen to the needs and desires of its members.