

Dirt or Soil: It's all about nutrients!

Two years ago, after hearing a proposal from representatives of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History and the Soil Science Society of America, The Fertilizer Institute's (TFI) Board of Directors agreed to become the lead sponsor of a soils exhibit. So began an exercise in creativity, flexibility, vision and trust.

At the time, the world's attention was not honed in on crops and agricultural production and was benefiting from cheap food prices. On the contrary, members of the fertilizer industry had been constantly trying to educate the public about the contributions of crop nutrients to world food production and food security. From our perspective, we believe there is no greater role for soil than its function in food production.

As they committed funding on behalf of the Nutrients for Life Foundation, TFI board members relied on TFI staff expertise to help tell our story and coordinate efforts to make sure every one of the visitors would walk away knowing the difference between dirt and soil. We think that difference is the plant nutrients which replenish our soils harvest after harvest and ensure the continued production of nutritious food - fertilizers.

Many things have changed since our initial commitment was made. Today, as we stand on the brink of a global food production crisis, we are just a few generations removed from the era of the Dust Bowl, when soil degradation took a tremendous toll on our society.

I am pleased to see that through our

"I would like to personally congratulate every single member of TFI's Board of Directors for their vision and direction throughout this initiative. Our decision to stray from our familiar comfort zone in the public policy arena to the world of philanthropy has propelled a crucial message."

sponsorship, millions of museum visitors annually will learn from the past and gain a better understanding of how fertilizers contribute to soils' role in food security and a healthy environment. The exhibit will foster a greater appreciation of the role modern agriculture plays in sustaining healthy soils among visitors from all generations.

I would like to personally congratulate every single member of TFI's Board of Directors for their vision and direction throughout this initiative. Our decision to stray from our familiar comfort zone in the public policy arena to the world of philanthropy has propelled a crucial message.

When we initially weighed the risks and benefits of this partnership, we couldn't yet picture children digging their hands into soil, moving panels to understand the layers beneath their feet or their parents realizing the critical role of soil fertility in feeding future generations. Seeing the exhibit come together reminds us that we have a priceless story to tell.

TFI's 2009 World Fertilizer Conference will be held in Washington, D.C., to provide the industry another opportunity to tour the Smithsonian exhibit. I encourage all of TFI Advocate's Washington, D.C., readers to go to the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of Natural History and learn about what soils are doing for you everyday.



TFI President Ford B. West