

## Presidential Biography

### Fredrick A. Bliss

President of ASHS: 1998–1999

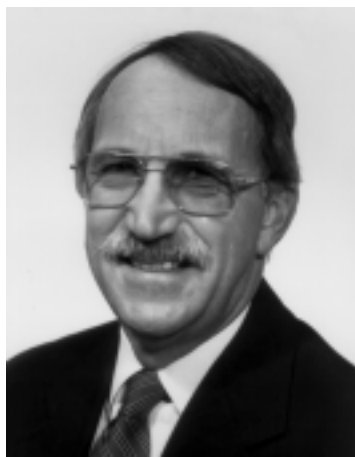
BS Univ. of Nebraska–Lincoln

PhD Univ. of Wisconsin–Madison

Fred Bliss was born in south-central Nebraska, where he grew up on a farm near Red Cloud. He received the BS degree (with honors) in agronomy at the Univ. of Nebraska–Lincoln and the PhD degree in horticulture–genetics from the Univ. of Wisconsin–Madison. Following postdoctoral study in genetics at the Univ. of Minnesota, Fred began his career as Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Horticulture at the Univ. of Wisconsin–Madison in 1966, at which time he and his family joined the USAID–Wisconsin project in Nigeria. He was a member of the team that established the Faculty of Agriculture in the Univ. of Ife, near Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

After completing 2 years in Nigeria and a sabbatical leave at the Univ. of Goettingen, Germany, Fred returned to the Dept. of Horticulture faculty at Madison. He was promoted to Associate Professor in 1971 and Professor in 1976. At the Univ. of Wisconsin–Madison, he was a member of the Plant Breeding and Plant Genetics Graduate group, serving as Chair in 1970. He served as major professor for 26 PhD and 8 MS students, many of whom are active in universities, government agencies, and private industries worldwide. In addition to mentoring graduate students, he has taught graduate and undergraduate courses at the Univ. of Wisconsin–Madison and Univ. of California (UC)–Davis.

In 1988, Fred and his wife Mary moved to Davis, Calif., where he was Professor of Pomology and the first holder of the Will W. Lester Endowed Chair in Pomology. He served as Department Chair from 1991 to 1994, guiding the department through the difficulties of



downsizing brought about by the weak California economy in the early 1990s.

Bliss' major contributions to horticultural research have been in genetics and breeding of common bean *Phaseolus vulgaris*. He and colleagues conducted studies of the genetic control of seed protein expression that provided evidence for the centers of domestication of common bean in the Americas. These studies lead to the identification of a novel seed protein in wild *P. vulgaris* that provides biological resistance to bean seed weevils. Collaborative studies with the Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical (CIAT) provided the basis for developing new dry bean varieties in Central and South America and East Africa. Bliss and his associate Ken Kmiecik studied nitrogen fixation in beans

and other legumes, developed snap and dry bean breeding lines and cultivars that fix enough atmospheric nitrogen for economic yields with only minimal added nitrogen fertilizer.

While at UC–Davis, Fred worked with his colleagues, Dr. Arulsekhar and Dr. Almehti, to develop a molecular marker–based genetic map for stone fruits (peach/almond) and to establish a rootstock breeding program that is being continued in the Dept. of Pomology. He is now Professor Emeritus at UC–Davis.

Fred became Director, Worldwide Plant Breeding, at Seminis Vegetable Seeds, Inc. in Apr. 1998, and is currently located at the World Research Headquarters in Woodland, Calif. He is responsible for seven Associate Directors of Breeding who supervise the ~100 breeders, and two Associate Directors of Research Stations, one for the Americas and the other for Europe.

Bliss has been active in numerous ASHS activities, including Associate Editor of the *Journal*; Chair of the Publications Committee; V.P. of the Research Division; and Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee. He was named a Fellow in 1985. Other awards include Fellow of AAAS and CSS; outstanding Graduate Educator, ASHS; ASSINSEL Award for Plant Breeding; Master Week Alumni Award at the Univ. of Nebraska, Lincoln; and the Meritorious Service Award of Bean Improvement Coop.

Fred and Mary live in Davis, Calif., where they enjoy antiquing, walking, art collecting, and each other. They have five grown children; Mike, Allen, and Jordan Bliss, and Mara and George Campbell.

---

## Preparing for the Next Hundred Years— Challenges for Change Presidential Address<sup>1</sup>

Fredrick A. Bliss  
*ASHS President, 1998–99*

Fellow members, guests, ladies and gentlemen. Many of my thoughts and actions this past year have been about what we can do for the American Society for Horticultural Science to assure our continued existence and

<sup>1</sup>Presented at the 96th Annual International Conference of ASHS, Minneapolis, 3 July 1999.

vitality. Maintaining a core of active, engaged members and attracting outstanding young horticulturists to ASHS is key to our survival and must be our highest priority. To achieve this goal we must identify the factors most likely to affect our profession and determine how to handle critical changes that will continue to occur.

Whether or not we like it, changes are occurring that affect us personally and professionally, individually, and as a group. I am not the first to caution that this Society must be vigilant in planning for the future. President Reuther stated in his 1963 ASHS presidential address that, "it is not the diversity or change, but the acceleration of change that is the most

significant and difficult factor to be dealt with.”

The American Society for Horticultural Science is not averse to trying new things that may involve some risk. There are many examples of new initiatives that gave very positive results, and some that in retrospect were of questionable value. This Society has thrived for nearly a century because members have individually and collectively met new challenges with great success. Recognizing when and how to change is difficult, and predictions for the future based on historical experience are notoriously inaccurate. To remain static will increase the risk of becoming irrelevant to the scientific community and unattractive to members of our profession, but to change without good reason or direction will be of no lasting value.

Although we may have limited control over the external factors that affect us, we must identify the most important ones and act to improve our efficiency and response to members' needs. To do this will require open discussion among members and agreement that a consensus will be reached. To deal with factors over which we have limited control, contingency planning rather than trying to predict the future with a high degree of certainty provides an attractive strategy. Flexible alternatives that produce desirable results, regardless of unforeseen factors that will arise, can be formulated through discussion and consensus building.

I will discuss seven challenges that deserve our full attention as we prepare to enter the new millennium and our second century as leaders within the horticultural profession. These are:

- Understanding the changing role of professional societies
- Focusing the goals and organization of ASHS
- Positioning ASHS as a science-based professional society to serve global horticulture
- Producing high-quality publications that attract authors and readers
- Presenting conferences attractive to members because of professional value
- Fitting headquarters location and staffing to our needs and resources
- Preparing for our Centennial celebration

All of the ideas and comments I present are by no means original. They come from many sources, some of which you may recognize. For example, some have been discussed by the Continuing Strategic Planning Committee and others mentioned in the report of the Blue Ribbon Panel. They do not represent an official position or viewpoint of ASHS. My intent is that if they are good ideas they should be seriously considered whatever the source.

**Challenge 1.** Understanding the changing role of professional societies

What is the role of professional societies in the lives and careers of scientists today? What should membership in a society provide to you? Traditional services and opportunities once offered may not have the same value as in the past. Membership is no longer prerequisite for publishing articles and attending profes-

sional meetings. Numerous commercial publishers of high-quality journals compete for cutting-edge papers on horticultural topics. Conferences sponsored by commercial firms, government agencies, and single-interest groups offer opportunities for scientific exchange. What value do horticulturists place on membership in ASHS?

If we wish to remain relevant, we will have to offer more than our present journals and the annual conference to current and future members. What are other desired benefits valuable to horticulturists and users of horticulture information? We are a relatively small organization that cannot always access goods and services economically. Perhaps through professional managers and outsourcing, additional benefits can be obtained, such as discounts on all types of books, computer software, information from library databases, insurance coverage, and management advice for individuals and small businesses and institutions worldwide. Members employed by large universities or companies often have access to things that are difficult to obtain economically in small colleges, isolated research stations, and private businesses. There may be nontraditional services ASHS can provide to attract horticultural entrepreneurs who need scientific information.

The internet is becoming pervasive. Is it possible to provide interactive educational programming? Can we provide access to important events and presentations that people will pay for without attending a central meeting? Can we provide a forum for members to present their expert opinions on important local, regional, and larger issues about which segments of the general public are seeking science-based information? Is it possible to replace the modest trade show at our Annual Conference with a virtual trade show that is web-based?

How do members allocate time and resources? ASHS is a volunteer-based organization that depends heavily on contributions of time and effort from each of you. Everyone has many competing activities. Have we reached a point where, even though members are well-intentioned, they do not have sufficient time to give? There are signs this may be happening. It is often difficult to find volunteers for Society activities, and even when committees are filled, assignments are not done carefully and promptly. Nominating committees cannot be sure they will routinely identify a full slate of candidates. Associate Editors have difficulty obtaining thorough, insightful, and constructive manuscript reviews on time.

Our organization must be streamlined and activities prioritized to attract volunteers and make optimal use of their time. Those of marginal value should be either brought into focus or dropped. Perhaps we should change from long-term, time-intensive volunteer commitments to short-term, tightly focused appointments. The duration of assignments can be shortened, activities concentrated, and use of the internet for planning and execution expanded. After tasks are completed, the com-

mittee should be dissolved. Recognizing that many horticultural activities are seasonal, it may be possible to recruit volunteers for specific months rather than year-long or multi-year assignments.

Members are our most valuable asset—one worth fighting to keep and working to expand. Membership and commitment are critical resources that most “for-profit” companies lack.

**Challenge 2.** Focusing the goals and organization of ASHS

The stated goal of ASHS is to be the premier science-based horticultural society. It is important to realize that science-based is not synonymous with research-oriented. There is a continuing sentiment that surfaces from time to time and with varying intensity, that ASHS is primarily a research-oriented society. Although research is an integral part of science, and therefore of this society, so, too, science-based teaching and education as well as extension and information dissemination are equally important activities of ASHS.

Our divisions, i.e., Education, Research, Extension, Industry, and International, provide the governance, administrative, and activity framework for the Society. This organizational structure reflects the way most U.S. colleges of agriculture were organized beginning nearly a century ago. Those institutions are changing and I believe it is time for us to change as well.

Divisions accomplish what the word suggests; they divide! In addition to defining structure, they channel people into a single, arbitrary group, when, in fact, most horticulturists are engaged in several integrated activities that cross traditional lines. They may have split appointments in academia or multiple responsibilities in a private business. A person forced to identify with the Industry Division will likely have interests also in research and information dissemination. In private companies, product development and marketing are similar to applied research and extension education in the public sector. By its very nature, horticulture includes basic and applied components. Often a particular crop, related crops, and an associated industry form the focal point for people with a common interest. It is time to recognize that horticulture is an integrative discipline, and to emphasize our similarities rather than magnify differences.

The governance and functional activities of ASHS can be separated to provide a more responsive, streamlined organization. Governance should continue to be provided by elected representatives of the membership serving on the Board of Directors. The size and composition of the Board are optimal for decision making. Representatives (Vice Presidents) can be chosen from defined groups similar to current divisions or somewhat redefined, e.g., extension, community, and business services; research and technology; business and industry; education and information technology; and global horticulture. Alternatively, elected representatives can be chosen according to U.S. geographic regions modified slightly to

provide similar numbers of members, plus an international region, or vice presidents could be elected "at large." Continuity is achieved by having each representative or vice president serve a two-year term. The three-year succession of President-elect, President, and Chair of the Board is long enough to provide continuity, yet short enough not to discourage people from taking the office.

Functional activities should be organized into subject matter sections having an elected chair and vice chair to coordinate and nurture activities of horticultural and scientific significance. Important issues can be addressed holistically within a section by researchers, teachers, and extension scientists from the public and private sectors focusing on topics of common interest.

Most current activities will fit into a few well-chosen sections. The 13 commodity and 18 cross-commodity Working Groups in the Research Division, six within Education, two each in Extension and Industry, and four in the International Division can be realigned to provide better balance and an integrated approach to topics of each group. Activities at the Annual Conference can be organized to coincide with the interests of one or more section. New crop-specific working groups may form given an opportunity to address crop-related issues holistically. Interest group-sponsored activities, such as Extension and Industry banquets, the International reception, alumni gatherings, and collegiate branch functions, can continue based on sufficient common interests among members.

**Challenge 3.** Positioning ASHS as a science-based professional society serving global horticulture

Who can deny that virtually all aspects of agriculture are influenced by global factors? The activities of ASHS should reflect this reality not only for foreign members but also for those from North America. New information technology greatly expands our ability to consider global topics and distribute scientific information that aids decision making by traditional and new clientele.

As an American-based Society we have encouraged membership and participation of horticulturists from outside the United States. However, we should embrace changes that recognize the global nature of horticulture to all our members and clients both in the United States and foreign countries. For better or worse we are members of a global community and that affects the activities of the horticultural profession. Perhaps even a name change, such as American Society for Science of Global Horticulture, might be considered. Acknowledging a global intention in our name, publications, and meetings will send a clear message to prospective members and users of science-based horticultural information worldwide that we are interested in their situations. However, we must be sensitive to other horticultural societies and explore areas of common interest. I am very enthusiastic about plans for our participation in the International Horticultural Congress planned for 2002.

There is no shortage of global issues of

scientific importance that ASHS should be addressing. Some that come to mind include sustainable food security, equitable use of plant genetic resources, world trade issues related to horticulture, application of biotechnology in horticultural crops to benefit the poor as well as rich countries, and the use and misuse of intellectual property rights protection in biology.

**Challenge 4.** Producing high-quality publications that attract authors and readers.

Publications are our most visible activity to the scientific community and to people in agribusiness seeking science-based information. We have long held that the opportunity to publish in an ASHS journal is an important service to members. In fact, a primary strategy for achieving Enhanced Internal Services, a Key Result Area of our Strategic Plan, is to "Improve publication quality, including diversity, user acceptance, competition, and process."

The *Journal*, *HortScience*, and *HortTechnology* are of excellent quality and routinely arrive on time. Turnaround time for well-prepared manuscripts is among the shortest for comparable publications. Along with technical quality and scientific integrity and credibility, ability to attract papers containing cutting-edge science is essential to build and hold a stable and diverse base of users/subscribers. The competition from other journals and commercial publishers is intense. Therefore, we must find ways to maintain an acceptable revenue stream while reducing or eliminating page charges to authors.

We are changing our publications from hard-copy distribution to a mix of options for on-line reception and downloading the most interesting articles. In the past we have debated whether to continue the *Journal* and *HortScience* or merge them into a single, high-quality publication. As we explore how best to go on-line, perhaps this topic should be revisited. Another idea might be to offer an outlet for "non-refereed" articles published rapidly, with a minimum of guidelines and with editing only for technical details. This is not such a new idea. The Bean Improvement Coop has been publishing non-refereed notes for over 20 years with good results. Valuable information is exchanged with minimal impediment. As far as I can tell, the credibility of information is quite high. Since it is recognized as non-refereed, there is no reason to embellish data or overstate the results.

Many challenges to our publications are external, but some are of our own doing. I continue to hear from members that they are either no longer submitting manuscripts to ASHS or are considering submitting elsewhere because of the trivial, mean-spirited nature of some reviews. Perhaps even more troubling, these same manuscripts rejected by our editorial process are being published by other fully reputable journals with no more than a format change. This is hardly the way to attract or retain authors. This is unacceptable.

**Challenge 5.** Organizing conferences attractive to members because of professional value

The report of the Blue Ribbon Panel suggests that the primary reason members attend the Annual Conference is to maintain professional competence and to network with colleagues. The goal of the Annual Conference cannot be stated more clearly! But how to accomplish this for a heterogeneous membership when demographics are changing rapidly? We will look to the Blue Ribbon Panel report for their suggestions and fresh new ideas.

At the very least, speakers and subject matter must be high quality, futuristic, and relevant to members' needs. Reorganization of ASHS activities into topical Sections that bring together related Working Groups also provides new opportunities for organizing the Annual Conference. Each Section might organize around a plenary session with a featured speaker, related symposia, workshops and meetings of the working groups, poster sessions, and a few high-quality oral sessions.

Why not have abstracts of all volunteered papers submitted initially as posters? Then ask the program committee to review abstracts for fresh ideas, quality, and content. Author(s) of the best four or five papers can be invited to present them in an oral session. This would: 1) allow oral sessions to be focused on relevant, current topics with enough critical mass to draw a substantial audience, 2) provide an element of prestige by being chosen to present an invited paper, 3) give flexibility in organizing oral sessions, with the number depending on sufficient high-quality papers to warrant a session. This will allow quality control and focused interest, which are not always achieved under our current system.

We should provide more visibility to members we recognize each year for their outstanding accomplishments. Why not have a poster for each new Fellow-elect, for the recipients of ASHS Career Awards, and Publications Awards recipients? Each honored person could be featured at a poster session so members can meet and talk with them. Currently we recognize honorees at the Awards Ceremony and a reception by invitation, but these provide only limited opportunity for colleagues to meet them and learn about their accomplishments.

The time and location of the Annual Conference are important factors affecting attendance. When conferences are held at the same time each year, some members will be systematically excluded because of the seasonal nature of their work. While summer meetings are convenient for many, some fall meetings held at an attractive location may also be desirable. Some people would like to attend meetings on a college campus, but it is unreasonable to think that a campus location will result in lower conference costs. Host departments can no longer subsidize conference costs by providing lower site fees and volunteer management. It is not plausible to return to a system where individual departments do all the planning and conference management. Responsibility for this should remain with Headquarters Staff working closely with local representatives.

Horticultural businesses are expanding, but

ASHS struggles to attract and maintain the interest of horticulturists in the private sector. We must provide meaningful activities and valuable services at the Annual Conference and other meetings, workshops, refresher courses, etc., offered via the internet. One suggestion might be to identify horticultural businesses interested in supporting and organizing a symposium or workshop of their choice at an ASHS-sponsored meeting. It should feature a science-based topic important to their business and interesting to ASHS members. In exchange for the support, they (with the organizing committee) would choose the speakers. The company would receive day passes for a specified number of their employees and guests, they could attend the Industry Banquet for a reduced fee, and distribute material promoting and describing their business. Surely there are many other activities that will attract industry participation. We must signal that ASHS is industry and business "friendly."

**Challenge 6.** Fitting Headquarters location and staffing to our needs and resources

Are the physical and human resources at ASHS Headquarters optimally suited to serve our membership? Our building and staff are highly visible to members and their efficient use is imperative. Headquarters was relocated to the current site to accommodate perceived needs for more space to expand publications and increase member services. However, those projections of staffing and space needs did not materialize, primarily because growth plans for ASHS Press were overly ambitious and we could not predict accurately how changing technology would affect publication activities. Subsequently, staff was reduced and their work schedules have become flexible. Use of electronic communications allows editorial work to be done off site, resulting in less need for on-site office facilities. Instead of producing hard-copy publications exclusively, we are offering a mix of hard-copy and electronic publications, with more emphasis likely to be placed on the latter.

Uncertainty over the amount and kind of office space that will be needed requires that we consider whether owning or leasing is preferable from both functional and fiscal perspectives. For many people, ownership of property is highly desirable, but we should use leasing when it will produce substantial savings. The responses we receive indicate that for virtually every member, their highest priority is low cost annual dues, publishing and subscription fees, and conference registration. To achieve this requires an efficient headquarters operation.

Several changes in headquarters staffing have been made and others are contemplated. Two years ago, our financial situation could not support hiring a permanent Executive Director. Last year, the four-person management team, and this year, Mike Neff serving as Interim Executive Director, have filled the responsibilities very well. However, for the future we are planning for a permanent Executive Director. A screening committee chaired by Blanche Dansereau has advertised for suitable candidates, with the goal being to fill the position by January 1, 2000.

We must continually ask whether there are better ways to manage ASHS. For example, some professional societies have contracted with management companies to outsource some day-to-day management tasks and provide member services. This need not and should not preclude members' involvement, but it might reduce volunteer time spent on routine matters. There are many pros and cons to this approach, but it is worth considering. We should also consider whether to join with other appropriate organizations for pursuing efficient management.

**Challenge 7.** Preparing for our Centennial celebration

In 2003, the ASHS will mark its 100th anniversary. What better time than the Centennial celebration to commemorate past accomplishments, begin new initiatives, and revitalize important ongoing activities? Although four years may seem like a long time into the future, we should begin planning to allow enough time for scheduling a series of interesting events throughout that year. We should begin by: 1) appointing a Centennial Committee to work with Headquarters, a local arrangements committee and the Annual Conference organizing committee to develop a comprehensive plan, 2) charging the Endowment Committee to develop a Centennial Campaign to increase the ASHS Endowment substantially, and 3) identifying new initiatives that would benefit from the additional attention associated with the Centennial Celebration.

To celebrate our centennial appropriately will require additional effort from all of our members. Hopefully, each of you will volunteer additional time and money and pitch in when you are asked to help. The success of this event will provide an indication of the vitality of ASHS and a prognosis for our second one hundred years.

I have suggested some substantial changes for consideration. The essential points of these seven challenges will be posted on the ASHS Website for members to consider and respond

with their opinions, ideas, and, hopefully, a willingness to engage in change. I invite you to help determine what, if any, changes should occur.

I have focused on challenges to ASHS that are internal and over which we have some measure of control. There are many more, just as real and as threatening, not only to ASHS as an organization but also to horticulture as a profession. Some prominent factors include: the changing makeup of colleges of agriculture and plant science departments in the major research universities; expansion of horticultural education into a wide range of two- and four-year colleges other than land-grant colleges; reduced core funding for horticultural research and outreach; professional specialization vs. integrative horticulture; consolidation and globalization of horticultural business; rapidly changing methods of communication; and privatization of agribusiness management consulting concurrent with downsizing cooperative extension, to name a few.

After emphasizing the challenges we face, I would be remiss not to mention some of the many opportunities that exist. For example, there is growing awareness of the importance of horticultural products to human health; sustainability has become an integral part of agriculture rather than a marginal activity; pest management is integrated rather than totally reliant on single solutions; molecular biology provides unprecedented opportunities to understand life processes and find solutions to difficult questions; resident and extended education can be packaged, presented, and extended in creative ways using electronic methods. Horticulturists must be active participants in these dynamic changes if we are to remain in the scientific mainstream.

I will close with a quote by Dr. Tex Frazier from his 1969 presidential address. "It is easy to point out problems of a profession; it is easy to straddle the fence once they are delineated; it is even easy to take a stand on them—one way or another. A greater challenge lies in suggesting means of solution; but the greatest challenge of all lies in working at the suggestions—in attempting to effect change. It requires time, energy, will, persistence, quiet reflection, presentation of opposing views, and, ultimately—for major policy matters—preparation of a ballot."

I hope I have raised your level of awareness to the challenges we face and some of the pathways to effect change. To continue as a leading professional society will require the contributions of many people. I believe we are up to the task.