Readers' Forum

American Society for Plasticulture: A Unique Organization

In 1989, the American Society for Plasticulture (ASP) became an Associated Group of the American Society for Horticultural Science (ASHS). ASP had professional ties with ASHS long before it was given Associated Group status. The relationship goes back to Spring 1967, when the front cover of *HortScience* (vol. 2, no. 1) was a black-and-white photo of the late Dr. E.M. Emmert's farm, showing black plastic mulch and low-cost plastic forcing (greenhouse) structures. Emmert was involved actively in both societies. The first annual conference (forerunner of today's ASP Congress) on "Use of Plastic Film in the Production of Horticultural Crops" convened in 1960 in Lexington, Ky., and was dedicated to Emmert for his pioneering work in the horticultural use of plastic films.

In 1960, George Marlowe (Univ. of Kentucky) invited 55 industry and university colleagues, whom he knew to be interested in the applications of plastics to agriculture, to Lexington for a conference on the subject. A second meeting, called "National Horticultural Plastic Conference" was held at Roanoke, Va. At the third meeting, in 1962, the attendees proposed the bylaws to form the National Agricultural Plastics Association (NAPA). Under Article II of the by-

laws, the purposes of the organization are clearly stated:

1. Bringing together those who are concerned with any phase of the knowledge of plastics and their uses in agriculture.

2. Promoting a better understanding of the problems and the progress among those concerned with research on and education of plastics and their uses, those who are concerned with production of plastics and those who use plastics in their agricultural practices.

3. Publishing scientific and practical information of value concerning agricultural uses of plastic.

4. Improving general agricultural and horticultural practices through the use of plastic products with the result of delivering improved quality products at lower cost to the ultimate consumer.

During this period, plastics were just beginning to receive attention in agriculture. At the 3rd conference, Marlowe, first President of NAPA, said "...One of the significant recent developments in horticulture has been the use of plastic films for crop production." Today we can appreciate fully the significance of his observation. At present, well more than 65 million lb of plastic films are used in the United States annually in crop applications such as mulches, rowcovers, and greenhouse covers. Many more pounds are used in trickle- and field-irrigation pipes, tubing, flower pots, seed flats, and packaging.

Over the years, NAPA membership had continued to grow and fluctuated between 200 and 400. Many nonmembers also participate at the Congresses, which are held every 18 months. The membership is divided equally between two groups: 1) re-

searchers, educators, and growers; and 2) business people who serve the agri-plastics industry as manufacturers, marketers, researchers, and consultants. Industry personnel attend the congresses to keep abreast of on-going research and to explain new products to researchers interested in testing their products.

In 1990, the membership voted to change the name from the National Agricultural Plastics Association to the American Society for Plasticulture to better reflect the activities and scope of the organization.

This unique interaction between university personnel and industry has resulted in ASP leading the development of the use of plastics in agriculture, particularly in horticulture. Many pioneering studies on development and uses of greenhouse films, plastic-covered greenhouse structures, degradable and nondegradable plastic mulching materials, drip irrigation, fertigation, soil fumigation, plastic containers and packaging, soil solarization, hydrophilic polymers, transplant containers, rowcovers, and high tunnel culture have been published in the Proceedings of the Congresses (Table 1).

ASP is a member association, along with associations from 13 other countries around the world, of the Comité Internationale des Plastiques en Agriculture (C.I.P.A.), headquartered in Paris, France. C.I.P.A. member associations rotate sponsorship of the international congresses. The 1992 XII International Congress on Plastics in Agriculture was held in Granada, Spain. ASP publishes a bimonthly newsletter called the *Agri-Plastics Report*. The Proceedings of the Congresses and other special reports are published in bound and microfiche editions.

The place of plastics in the U.S. horticulture and agricultural production systems is tremendous and growing. Sylvan Wittwer, director emeritus of Michigan State University's Agricultural Experiment Station, stated that, "No technological development has so much modified the course of controlled-environment agriculture as the development of plastic films. The modern-day plastic revolution is manifest in the precipitous rise and expansion of cultivated areas under plastic greenhouses, tunnels, rowcovers, mulches, and drip irrigation. Plastic films and covers will extend and push

Table 1. *List of Congresses and Past Presidents.*

Year	Location	President
1960	Lexington, Ky.	
1961	Roanoke, Va.	George Marlowe
1962	State College, Miss.	P. Howard Massey
1963	New York, N.Y.	E.L. Moore
1964	Athens, Ga.	Raymond Sheldrake
1965	Phoenix, Ariz.	R.E. Johnstone
1966	Lexington, Ky.	Norman F. Oebker
1968	San Diego, Calif.	Donald J. Cotter
1969	Fort Collins, Colo.	Bernarr J. Hall
1971	Chicago, Ill.	Kenneth L. Goldsberry
1973	San Antonio, Texas	J.W. (Bill) Courter
1975	Vineland, N.J.	John E. Larsen
1977	San Diego, Calif.	Norman F. Smith
1978	Homestead, Fla.	Robert Grove
1980	Tucson, Ariz.	Herb H. Bryan
1981	Cleveland, Ohio	Merle Jensen
1983	Manchester, N.H.	William Bauerle
1984	Asheville, N.C.	Otho Wells
1986	Peoria, Ill.	William J. Lamont, Jr.
1987	Portland, Ore.	John M. Gerber
1989	Orlando, Fla.	N.S. (Bill) Mansour
1990	Montreal, Que.	George Hochmuth
1991	Mobile, Ala.	Peter Bergholtz
1992	Overland Park, Kan.	James Brown

crop productivity into new geographical frontiers in both agriculturally developed and less-developed nations. Their use characterizes much of the agriculture for the 21st century."

ASP will continue to serve, as it has for the past 30 years, as a fertile meeting ground for university scientists and the commercial ag-plastics industry. This organization has spawned many of the new technologies and plastic products that have changed the face of modern-day horticulture. Future solutions to environmental questions, such as disposal of agriculture plastics, are being debated and addressed currently by the Society's Plastics Disposal Committee. As in the past, ASP will serve as a forum for people with ideas to meet people who make things happen.

For membership information and prices on Congress Proceedings and other special reports, contact: H. Carl Hoefer, Executive Secretary, American Society for Plasticulture, P.O. Box 860238, St. Augustine, FL 32086; phone 904/794-2356.

*William J. Lamont, Jr.
Kansas State Univ., Manhattan*

Readers' Forum

Your chance to give your opinion on controversial issues or items of general interest, or to comment on previous articles that appear in
HortTechnology.

Send your letter to:

Jack Kelly
HortTechnology Editor
Dept. of Horticulture
428 PSSB
Michigan State Univ.
East Lansing, MI 48824