

## Presidential Biography

### William R. Woodson

President of ASHS, 2006–2007

*Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana*

A native of Arkansas, William “Randy” Woodson received a bachelor’s degree in horticulture and chemistry (1979) from the University of Arkansas and a master’s degree in horticulture (1981) and doctorate in horticulture/plant physiology (1983) from Cornell University.

Woodson was an assistant professor of horticulture at Louisiana State University (1983-85). In 1985, he went to Purdue University, where he was assistant professor of horticulture (1985-89), associate professor of horticulture (1989-93), and named professor of horticulture in 1993. In 1996-98, he was head of the Department of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture at Purdue; visiting professor, Ecole Nationale Supérieure Agronomique d’Toulouse (1998); associate dean and director of Agricultural Research Programs, Purdue (1998-04); and dean of agriculture, Purdue (2004-08). In May 2008, Woodson became Purdue’s executive vice president for academic affairs and provost. As the university’s chief academic officer, his



responsibilities include oversight for all academic programs on the West Lafayette campus and on the four Purdue-affiliated regional campuses.

Woodson has been an ASHS member since 1981. He has served ASHS in many capacities, including chair, Continuing Education Committee (2000-02); vice president, Research Division (1997-2000); Tex Frazier Lecture

Program Committee (1997-2000); Graduate Educator Award Selection Committee (1991-94); associate editor, *HortScience* (1991-93); associate editor, *Journal of the American Society for Horticultural Science* (1991-94); Distinguished Lecture Program Committee (1988-90); and Outstanding Publication Selection Committee (1987).

Woodson’s honors and awards include elected chair, National Agricultural Biotechnology Council (2001); ASHS Vegetable Publication Award (2000); Alex Laurie Award for Outstanding Scientific Paper in Floricultural Science (2000); ASHS Fellow (1998); Outstanding Service Award, Indiana Raw Products Association (1997); Golden Apple Award for Service to the Indiana Tree Fruit Industry, Indiana Horticultural Society (1997); ASHS Career Researcher Award (1996); B.Y. Morrison Memorial Medal and Lecture, USDA-ARS and ASHS (1996); Gamma Sigma Delta Award of Merit for Research (1995); and Purdue University Agriculture Research Award (1994).

## Horticultural Science: A Translational Science with a Strong Past and a Bright Future

ASHS 2007 Presidential Address: William R. Woodson  
*Scottsdale, AZ, 18 July 2007*

Thank you, Paul, for that kind introduction. It is my distinct honor and privilege to address the members of the American Society for Horticultural Science as your 104th president. I have been, and remain truly humbled by your election of me to this position. One of my real joys in preparing this presidential address has been reviewing each of the speeches given by the previous presidents over our 100 plus year history. Dr. Jules Janick deserves tremendous credit for compiling these speeches in a wonderful publication for our centennial celebration. Past presidents have focused their comments on many topics but several seem to represent recurring themes. One notable theme throughout history has been the effort to differentiate horticulture from other botanical pursuits. Liberty Hyde Bailey, for example, delivered the first presidential address to the members

of the Society in Philadelphia in Dec. 1904. In the address, titled “What is horticulture?”, he sought to define this emerging field of science. The organization of the Society for Horticultural Science (changed later to ASHS) was an attempt on the part of our forefathers to put a proverbial “stake in the ground” for our field. Dr. Bailey and his colleagues sought to distinguish our field from the “pure science” discipline of botany. In doing so, our new president emphasized that this distinction did not imply that horticultural science was “impure,” but rather sought to put our emerging field in the context of others. Professor Bailey went on to note that when he was asked to take the chair of horticulture at the Michigan Agricultural College, a prominent botanist told him that he did not see how under heaven any man could take a professorship in horticulture. Commenting further, our first presi-

dent said: “When I sought to minimize the disgrace of it by saying that a horticulturist needs to be a botanist, my mentor replied: yes, but he needs to be a horticulturist too!” As my teenage daughter would say, we’ve been dissd from the beginning!

Horticultural science is a translational science. We seek, in my opinion, to create new knowledge, and put discoveries in botany, genetics, chemistry, molecular biology, and other disciplines to work. Horticultural scientists are frequently the “observers” of nature who seek to explain observations for the benefit of our crops and the people who grow and maintain these important plants. Discoveries in plant reproduction, plant development, flowering, ripening, and senescence have all emerged from observations originally made by horticultural scientists and professionals.

A few examples of the careful observations and experiments of horticultural scientists include the experiments conducted by Garner and Allard on photoperiodism that were initiated in 1918. These critical observations led to the concept of a reversible photoreaction in plants that we now know to be mediated by phytochrome. Perhaps as important to agriculture is the early application of this knowledge to the flowering of plants in greenhouses following the manipulation of photoperiod by Ken Post at Cornell University. Another great example lies in modern biotechnology, which has its roots in discoveries in horticulture. Early work on plant propagation and tissue culture led the way for genetic modification of plants. Horticultural science was at the center of plant biotechnology development of the gene gun, when John Sanford blasted away at plant cells in his laboratory at Cornell. This work was critical to the application of biotechnology to the improvement of many crops, including maize and soybeans.

Horticultural science and horticultural scientists have much to be proud of. We have contributed to the discovery of new knowledge in plant biology, but more importantly, we've translated these discoveries into agricultural industries that contribute to the wealth and well being of mankind.

One bit of evidence that horticulture is a translational science is the fact that many people know something about our field. I've often heard that horticulture is the #1 avocation in America. There are many fans of the work we do and many opportunities for the people we educate in this field.

Agriculture is experiencing a bit of a renaissance in my view. I believe the citizens of this world are beginning to recognize the key role that agriculture plays in addressing major societal issues such as energy, environmental health, and human health. At Purdue, we have experienced significant increases in enrollment in the College of Agriculture for each of the past 4 years, with our largest freshman class in 15 years entering the College this fall. Horticulture and

horticulturists have much to contribute to the major societal issues I cited before. Our continued commitment to youth education, to relevant research, and to professional outreach will ensure that horticulture remains a key field in the agricultural sciences.

Another frequent topic for ASHS presidents is the "state of the society." I'm pleased to report that the society is strong. Our publications have never been stronger, with record submissions and growing impact factors. Membership is stable with a growing number of international members in the society, reflecting the huge opportunities for horticulture around the globe. The commitment of our membership to our annual meetings is strong with over a third of the active members attending this conference each year. Over the past few years your board has been creatively and aggressively putting into place a number of key programs that are serving ASHS and horticulture very well. In my first reflections column I encouraged ASHS to become an "engaged society." President-elect John Clark and his colleagues on the National Issues Task Force have kept us at the table both in Congress and the administration. I can't recall a time when horticultural crops have received so much attention in the halls of Congress and USDA. Through our continued efforts and collaborations with colleagues in industry this may well translate into funding for the specialty crop initiative. This is critically needed, and the horticultural producers have spoken often about the need for increased research and education funding. I'm optimistic.

ASHS and its members are also taking an active role in the "globalization" of horticulture. The Global Horticulture Initiative seeks to increase awareness and, ultimately, funding to address the critical issues facing the production, storage, and transportation of horticultural products around the globe. Our products are key to the health and well being of people in developing nations and the production of these products represents real opportunity for farmers across the globe. I urge you all to consider the global implica-

tions of your work and encourage your students to do the same.

For several years your board has considered the possibility of ASHS taking an active role in the certification of professionals in the field. It has been felt for quite some time that the practice of horticulture needs to be elevated in the eyes of consumers through the establishment of, and adherence to professional standards. To this end, a number of member-based committees have focused intensely on this issue. The first outcome of this was the Certified Professional Horticulturist program that is up and running. The second, and potentially more far-reaching effort is just under way. Fred Davies and others on his committee have done the heavy lifting to launch the ASHS-Certified Horticultural Advisor program, which seeks to develop and implement an industry-led test to certify the qualifications of professional practitioners of horticulture in the industry. Your board has supported this effort both spiritually and financially. If successful, this could boost the professional recognition of horticultural practitioners as well as of ASHS. If successful, this program could boost the need for extension horticulturists in the delivery of continuing education programs for certified horticultural advisors. To be successful, members of this society need to be engaged. Those of you who have key connections with the production, wholesale, retail, and service industries of horticulture need to "encourage" participation in this program. Initially, participation needs to be in the form of completing a survey to help us identify the key areas for certification testing. The committee hopes to launch this program with the first testing of professionals at our conference in Orlando in 2008. Your support is critical to move this forward.

Finally, I want to thank my colleagues on the board as well as the outstanding staff at ASHS for all their support during my tenure as your president. This society has meant a great deal to me as a professional, and I pledge to you all my continued commitment to advancing the mission of ASHS.