

Professional Recognition

ASAE recognized and acted on the importance of becoming an established branch of the engineering profession. Several important trends in professional development were beginning to take place during the 1950s and '60s.

In 1950, the Professional Registration Committee began work to recognize agricultural engineering as an engineering profession. It was during this time that the movement for professional registration received its initial impetus. The increasing degree of specialization in agricultural engineering, however, created difficulties with the examination for registration.

By 1969, 42 percent of ASAE members were registered, second only to ASCE among engineering societies. It would not be until 1994, however, before the formation of the ASAE Professional Engineering Institute (PEI) came into existence, providing a place for professional agricultural engineers within the Society and enhancing the credibility of those members in the engineering community.

In 1954 and 1956 respectively, ASAE obtained membership in the American Society for Engineering Education and the Engineers Joint Council. These two moves brought increased recognition of agricultural engineering as an engineering profession.

Another aspect of professional development that gained momentum during this period and strengthened the professional stance of agricultural engineering was graduate level instruction. Prior to 1950, only eight doctoral degrees were granted in agricultural engineering. Between 1950 and 1956, 43 Ph.D. degrees were granted. By 1963, 34 agricultural engineering departments had become accredited, up from three in 1943.

The 1950s and '60s were a period of rapid growth for ASAE, a time in which professional development and recognition of agricultural engineering attained their most marked progress. ASAE had truly become an established branch of engineering.

"Engineering of Biology"

The concept of biology being connected to agricultural engineering took root in 1937 when ASAE member C. O. Reed, professor at Ohio State University, argued that agriculture is engineering. The factor that conferred distinction upon agricultural engineering was that "it is the engineering of biology," Reed said.

The idea emerged again in 1960 when the concept of biological engineering brought about a great deal of discussion. In 1962, E. H. Kidder of Michigan State and

an ASAE Director, stated that modern agricultural engineering was essentially biological engineering, that "many" new biological engineering departments were being established at various institutions, and that perhaps ASAE ought to consider "broadening its base to include all aspects of biological engineering." There was even a hint that ASAE might want to consider changing its name.

President Arthur W. Farrall regarded the "ability to combine the knowledge of biology with engineering" as offering the "greatest opportunity that has happened to our profession in years."

While agricultural engineers moved closer to being "bioengineers" during the 1960s, they did not want to be limited completely to the practice of bioengineering. Also during this time, agricultural engineering departments were beginning to consider changing their names. In 1965, North Carolina State University announced the department name had been changed to the Biological and Agricultural Department. It would be several more decades before the word "biological" would be reflected in the Society's name.

"Agricultural engineering is one of the younger professions, and its importance is steadily increasing. The high efficiency of American agriculture has been in a great measure the result of the rapid development of farm machinery, and agricultural engineering has been instrumental in this development."

1931, Arthur Hyde
U.S. Secretary of Agriculture

Society Headquarters Expands

In 1958, Jimmy L. Butt assumed the title of Executive Secretary (later named Executive Vice President). The following year Raymond Olney retired. During this time, the staff at ASAE headquarters grew and changed considerably. This expansion brought about the need for more space.

In 1962, the Finance Committee recommended that a permanent site in St. Joseph, Mich., be obtained. In 1969, ASAE moved to a new 11,000-square-foot facility that was dedicated in April 1970.



ASAE's new headquarters building was dedicated in April 1970.

ASAE President Norval H. Curry, who provided his vital services during the period of land acquisition and building construction, said the new building was "erected in anticipation of the enormous expansion of the agricultural engineering profession and related engineering responsibilities which ASAE had assumed."

In 1980, a 6,000-square-foot addition was added to the building to accommodate increased publication activity.

The Challenge of Change

By the late 1970s, ASAE had grown from one man's vision to a well-organized, responsible group of 8,000 members with many notable accomplishments along the way. But change was on the horizon. By the early 1980s, the Society witnessed a trend of significant changes for the organization, its members, and the profession.

In 1984, President James H. Anderson observed "factors influencing that change include: the severe economic conditions encompassing the agricultural industry, the resulting financial impact on the Society, the loss of some traditional areas of employment, the emerging new areas of employment and Society membership, the identification of the need for the Society and the profession to react to change, and the significant steps by the Society to adapt to developing trends."

ASAE President Jimmy L. Butt told members in 1988, "Change has impacted the profession and the Society in many ways. The scope of the Society as defined in the 1920s no longer is adequate for the 21st century. A technical recognition and renewal is needed."

In an address to members in 1995, Executive Vice President Roger Castenson noted that he saw evidence of "very real, tangible changes of substance transforming ASAE: changes in structure, changes in scope, and changes in the way services are developed and delivered to members."

Executive Vice President Russell H. Hahn observed, "1997 has been a year in which members and staff have been challenged to expand our conceptions of what *is* into what *could be*."

By 1999, President Gale Holloway said of the restructuring, "I believe we have emerged from this era of change into an area of stability and focus - with our focus now on meeting member needs."

Executive Vice President M. Melissa Moore in 2003 added efforts to promote the profession and increase networking and opportunities for technical exchange.



The position of headquarters executive vice president was created in 1956. Since that time, ASABE has been served by four executive vice presidents: Jimmy L. Butt, Roger C. Castenson, Russell H. Hahn, and M. Melissa Moore, current executive vice president.

A New Society Name

Of all the changes in the Society's history, none was debated as long or had a more profound impact than changing the name of the Society.

In 1984, ASAE President Bill Harriott noted that in the not-too-distant future, "We will need to consider a name change for the Society." That discussion, which had its roots in 1937, would continue for more than 20 years.

The proposition for a name change was sent to the membership for a vote in 2004. In the summer of 2005, by a strong vote of the membership, the name of the Society officially changed to the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers.

ASAE President Jerry L. Wille, who was president during the name change, remarked, "The profession has evolved and expanded over the last almost 100 years. Our engineering skills deal with the entire food and fiber chain and all agricultural and biological systems. Now our professional Society name will be representative and descriptive of this breadth and depth."

A new logo was selected later that year. President Otto J. Loewer noted, "This new look captures the spirit of design criteria and conveys a blend of our profession's heritage while embracing a bright futuristic global perspective."

A Focal Point for the World

In April 2007, the location of the ASABE headquarters facility was declared an ASABE historic landmark.

Past President and Past Executive Vice President Jimmy L. Butt noted, "This plaque will forever identify this site as the world focal point for agricultural and biological engineering activities."

As the Society looks to the future, ASABE members will continue to be at the forefront of the latest technological advances in agricultural and biological engineering. They will continue to bring exciting innovations to reality, find solutions to engineering challenges, meet the engineering needs of a growing population, and provide engineering for a sustainable tomorrow. In addition, ASABE will continue to become a more significant global organization throughout the 21st century.

J. Brownlee Davidson, one of the founding fathers of the Society, would be extremely proud of what his vision for an agricultural society has become 100 years later. His words are as meaningful today as they were in 1907.

"I am firmly convinced of the importance and need of our work ... to aid our profession in every way possible, and to benefit the world to the greatest degree."