

Introductory Remarks

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Welcome to the “Symposium on Fertilizing Crops for Functional Food.” It is a joy to have the privilege of moderating this symposium. Fertilizing crops for the functionality of food—for its nutraceutical properties—can be one part of the full set of production practices needed to deliver increased value to producer and consumer alike. This is the first time for such an event at the annual meetings of the tri-societies, ASA/CSSA/SSSA.

The increasing media attention to organic food is received differently in the science community than in agri-business. Scientists look at the principles and definitions of organic farming, note correctly that its goals cannot be met with its methods, and tend to dismiss it. Agri-business, however, is more familiar with another principle – utterly non-scientific yet highly functional – and that principle is that “the customer is always right.” The customer in this case isn’t right, but is expressing an unmet need. Consumer demand for organic food points to a perception that agronomy has failed to meet a need.

People choose organic foods for good reasons. One of them is a desire for foods that contribute more to

their health and longevity. There’s no scientific basis for their expectation that organically produced food will meet that desire. But science exploring functional foods and nutraceuticals is identifying not only new compounds of general benefit to health, but also those that are specific to the needs of specific people. The need expressed for food that is organic, can be met by food that is functional!

The literature contains plenty of evidence of an impact of mineral nutrients on the classical nutritional categories of vitamins, minerals, proteins, and oils. Decades if not centuries of research have documented such impacts. But little has so far been published on how mineral nutrients impact these newly discovered nutraceutical compounds. That is the topic of today’s symposium. It is my hope that this symposium will be one small step advancing such science. The small step, I hope, will contribute to a giant leap forward in improving the perception of agriculture. Both producers and consumers should see that agriculture rightly claims to nourish the soil to nourish the world.

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