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SOIL QUALITY TWENTY YEARS LATER: LESSONS LEARNED AND TO BE LEARNED

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Plato’s proclamation on the fragility of our soil resources, reprinted by Dr. Daniel Hillel in his 1991 book entitled Out of the earth: Civilization and the life of the soil, coupled with the 2015 conclusion by Karlen and Rice that “soil degradation remains a global problem caused by many diverse factors,” can only cause one to stop and ask if we are really making any progress toward improving the health of our global soil resources. My objectives for this presentation are to: (1) clarify that the modern concept of soil health did not spring up overnight, (2) briefly review what we consider to be milestones that have been achieved during the past 25 years, (3) identify some of the challenges and barriers that have been encountered and those that remain, and (4) discuss some of the recent developments being pursued to achieve the cultural change needed to sustain soil for current and future generations. Having focused on soil quality/health endeavors since the 1990s, I stress that those accomplishments were built on foundations laid by many excellent scientists, engineers, and scholars. With regard to what has been achieved during the past two and one-half decades, I suggest that perhaps the former U.S. President John F. Kennedy would have summarized it as requesting that humankind no longer ask what the soil can do for you, but rather what you can do to protect it! Another major factor that helped guide my passion and commitment to soil health was my friend, mentor, and former colleague Dr. Bill Larson who often stated that soil was “the thin layer covering the planet that stands between us and starvation.” I will be concluding my lecture with the question of whether or not you are doing everything you can to ensure our fragile soil resources are being sustained for an infinite number of generations to come?

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