

THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF SUGAR BEET TECHNOLOGISTS: ADVANCING SUGARBEET RESEARCH FOR 75 YEARS

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ABSTRACT

The need for a formal organization that would facilitate communication among diverse facets of the beet sugar industry was recognized by participants in an informal group known as “The Sugar Beet Roundtable”. T. G. Stewart, an extension agronomist with Colorado State College of Agriculture (now Colorado State University), is credited with organizing the first meeting of the Roundtable at Ft. Collins, CO in 1935. After the second meeting of the Roundtable in 1936, researchers from California were invited to join the 1937 discussions. The process of creating a more structured national organization that would bring together the various facets of the industry culminated during the closing session of the 1937 meeting (Brewbaker, 1948). A committee was assigned the task of drafting a constitution and by-laws for discussion at the first session of the 1938 meeting (Brewbaker, 1948; Stewart, 1962).

The American Society of Sugar Beet Technologist (ASSBT) was officially created on 13 January 1938 in Salt Lake City, UT with the adoption of a constitution and bylaws. Discussions at the Roundtable meetings were limited to breeding, agronomy, or other phases of production research; ASSBT has included chemists and factory technologists as full participants since its beginning (Stewart, 1962). According to the original constitution, “*The objective of this society shall be to foster all phases of sugar beet and beet sugar research, and act as a clearing house for the exchange of ideas resulting from such work*” (Anonymous, 1940; Oldemeyer, 1987). The wording of the current mission statement (bsdf-assbt.org/assbt) has changed slightly but remains primarily focused upon the original objectives.

ASSBT has not only fostered exchanges among its North American members but also has facilitated communication with colleagues in Europe. As early as 1940, the membership rolls included three European researchers (Brewbaker, 1940). The feasibility of a joint ASSBT-IIRB (International Institute for Beet Research) meeting was considered in 1960 and ASSBT sent an official delegation of five to the first joint meeting of the two organizations in London, England in 1961 (Stewart, 1962). In 1963 a delegation of ASSBT members were guests of an IIRB hosted tour of the European sugarbeet industry and two years later a delegation representing IIRB toured some U.S. production areas as guests of ASSBT. A second ASSBT group toured Denmark and Sweden in 1969 and ASSBT hosted a tour of some of the production areas of the U.S. by IIRB members in 1973 (Martin, 1979). Since 1973, ASSBT has sponsored three visits to IIRB meetings in Europe. The first and only, joint IIRB-ASSBT Congress was convened 26 February 2003 in San Antonio, TX (Gebhard et al., 2003).

Between 37 and 140 sugarbeet researchers participated in the 1935 to 1937 Roundtable discussions that preceded the formation of ASSBT. Two years after the formation of ASSBT, the organization had 256 members (Brewbaker, 1940). Membership had increased to 354 on the tenth anniversary (Cannon, 1946) of the formation of ASSBT and regional meetings were held in Detroit, MI and Salt Lake City, UT. On its twenty-fifth anniversary (Stewart, 1962), ASSBT had

633 members representing 35 states and 20 countries. Membership dropped to 550 on the fiftieth anniversary (Oldemeyer, 1987) of ASSBT and is currently about 300 as it celebrates its seventy-fifth anniversary.

Formal communication among members occurs through oral and poster presentations at biennial meetings, published proceedings of the meetings, articles relevant to the industry in a peer-reviewed Journal, and through on-line web-sites that allow unrestricted access to all society publications. There were no meetings in 1944, because of war-time restrictions and the meeting scheduled for 1980 as delayed until the winter of 1981 because of severe economic problems in the industry; all other meetings have occurred at two-year intervals. Prior to 1956, all research reports were published as proceedings of the biennial meetings (PASSBT). The first two volumes (1938 and 1940) were distributed to members as mimeographed reports. From 1942 to 1954 the proceedings were compiled in book form. After its launch in 1956, the Journal of Sugar Beet Research (JASSBT) became the principal ASSBT publication for distribution of research results. JASSBT was renamed the Journal of Sugar Beet Research (JSBR) in 1988. Publications of the ASSBT are now accessible without charge to the general public on recently established web-sites (Panella, et al., 2011). These sites provide access to all issues of JASSBT and JSBR (assbt-jsbr.org), and the proceedings of the biennial meetings (assbt-proceedings.org).

ASSBT has established four award categories to recognize members whose contributions to the industry and/or Society are substantial. The **Forty-Year Veteran Award** recognizes any individual, member or nonmember, whose service has benefited the industry for 40 years. The **Meritorious Service Award** acknowledges members “who have been outstanding in promoting the objectives of the Society, or have made significant contributions to the beet sugar industry”. Those elected to **Honorary Membership** “have rendered outstanding service to the beet sugar industry or have by virtue of scientific accomplishment acquired the admiration and respect of this Society”. The most prestigious award the Society offers is the **Savitsky Memorial Award** named in honor of Viacheslav and Helen Savitsky. The Savitsky Award recognizes those who “have excelled in either scientific advancement in the field of sugar technology, or service and dedication to the sugar industry”. Only seven individuals have received the Savitsky Memorial Award.

While specific research objectives have changed over the years, ASSBT and its members have continued to focus on increasing productivity, reducing costs, and adapting new technology to old problems. A priority topic at the 1940 meeting was the standardization of experimental methods (Doxtator, et al., 1940). Mechanization of all facets of production but particularly harvesting was emphasized during the first ten years of ASSBT (Smith, 1950). Diseases, insect, and weed control issues change over time but are a constant threat to production. Fertilizer management, tillage options, seedling emergence, and other management practice need to be refined as new equipment, varieties, and knowledge becomes available. Postharvest storage losses have been recognized by ASSBT as a problem at least since 1946 (Cannon, 1946). Improving sucrose extraction rates and the efficiencies of factories has been and continues to be a high priority. Public policy decisions that will affect profitability remain unpredictable. Diseases and insect pests are occurring with increased intensity in some areas and show no sign of diminishing. The optimization of precision agriculture technologies to specific environments will enhance production efficiency. Remaining competitive in a global economy will require the continuation of the productive cooperation between industry and public research intuitions that has been facilitated for the past 75 years by ASSBT. ASSBT will remain a strong, effective,

vehicle for this cooperation as long as it keeps the vision of its founders and those who have followed as its mission.

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