



George J. Hochmuth III, President 2005

2005 FSHS PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS GEORGE HOCHMUTH

First of all I want to welcome you to the 118th annual meeting. I think this meeting will be an interesting and informative meeting in keeping with what members expect each year. This past year has been a very busy year for your Board of Directors under the very able leadership of Craig Campbell, your BOD chair. Like previous BODs, we have struggled with issues such as membership numbers and what the future might bring. As you might know, our Administrative Assistant asked to be relieved of her duties to return more of her time to her private business. Your BOD entered into an agreement with ASHS to assume administrative and fiscal responsibilities for FSHS. Of course you do not get something for nothing and FSHS is paying a very reasonable fee of \$7500 per year for this service. You will hear more about this at the annual Business Meeting. This will be the first year for the new Section, the Ornamental, Landscape and Gardening Section, which is a combination of two previous sections. We still have more work to do and will continue to have work to do to keep FSHS strong and vibrant. I want to talk with you a little bit this morning about FSHS, change, and our relevance as we go through change. I am going to ask some questions of us and ask you to help your society find answers to these questions we all have.

All in all FSHS is holding its own I think, in terms of members and activities. Nearly half of our members attend the annual meeting, which most consider a pretty good proportion. I know there are some serious concerns among the leadership and membership about declining member numbers. I too am concerned, not so much about declining membership per se, but that we are adequately serving our membership whatever it might be in terms of numbers. Are we still relevant or as relevant as we can possibly be? I am also concerned about whether our membership potential suffers because we are not actively reaching out to those who might benefit from FSHS membership and participation. Change should also bring opportunity. After all, we are the oldest active state horticultural society in the country, begun in Ocala, Florida in 1888 by 13 growers wanting a venue to share experiences and learn more about crop production. Our membership grew to nearly 2000 in the late 1980s, but has declined to about 350 today. Reasons for this have been covered by previous Presidents in their addresses to this membership, and I can tell you that your BOD takes this issue seriously. We have activated an old idea of a membership committee and have reinvigorated our efforts to reach out. You should have noticed more advertising about our meeting this year in many places. Our website activities under the leadership of Mark Ritenour have increased, and we have a new brochure. Your BOD has been very busy carrying out an aggressive program to look for old members who have not been active recently and in looking for new places to search for new members.

Whatever numbers our membership becomes, we must take strides to be sure FSHS is relevant to these members. As we add new members, and I am sure we will add new members, they must see a benefit to their membership. I am sort of speaking to the choir today for you are not the ones who need to hear this, but perhaps in listening you will be inclined to offer your ideas and assistance for helping strengthen FSHS for serving its members and that should result in new members. I am sure it is no surprise to anyone in the room

that horticulturists today have many opportunities for belonging to groups and for publishing research results. Many FSHS members continue to be disappointed over the loss of grower membership. Shortage of funds in both the private and public sectors make it important that one prioritizes their activities like they never had to do before. Growers and grower groups have many avenues for obtaining information like never before. FSHS meetings are not the only source or maybe not even the main sources for information. Like the growers, horticultural researchers have many new avenues for publishing research and many other societies for membership. Therefore, activities, such as belonging and participating in FSHS must have high relevance like never before. What should our membership look like and how will we be relevant and valuable to that membership?

Are we relevant today for our members today? If we look back over the history of FSHS, we see many, many examples that are testament to the relevance of FSHS members to the membership. In fact I don't think anyone in the room would dispute the assertion that the strengths of horticulture industries in this state have been in large part related to the fact that FSHS existed, with scientists, industry representatives, and growers sharing ideas and experiences in the sessions and the proceedings. Think about the successes in our industries and I will wager there were FSHS members involved. I am not going to highlight the various agencies, organizations, universities, and departments involved here, but rather to point out that everyone involved was a FSHS member.

FSHS members developed and reported on new varieties of our horticultural crops, including citrus, vegetables, ornamental crops, strawberries, and tropical and deciduous fruit crops and berries. Many of these advances made it possible to produce these crops more efficiently in the challenging environment of Florida for shipping north. Today, are we still relevant? FSHS members still are hard at work developing new varieties of important horticultural crops. Just think about the potential for expanding the blue berry industry in Florida and reawakening a peach industry in this state. Hopefully those workers are, or will be, involved in FSHS as a means to share their information with colleagues.

New production practices have been developed and furthered by FSHS members, and furthered for adoption by growers, including micronutrient fertilization, crop production techniques in terms of spacing, bedding, transplanting, to name a few. New fertilizers and formulations have been developed or tested and demonstrated by FSHS members. Plastic mulch and drip irrigation technologies for vegetable producers were refined and demonstrated by FSHS members so that today Florida vegetable producers are among the most modern in the world. Are these types of FSHS members relevant today? I think the answer is "yes." These members are building on a solid past to develop new technologies that will be important to the success of horticultural industries producing crops in an ever urbanizing state. For example, these members will develop the best management practices for nutrient and pest management that will be critical to the future of horticulture.

Research and extension with harvesting and handling practices have been a major area of effort by FSHS members.

Proper harvesting and handling practices for Florida horticultural products have been critical to the success of these products in the trade. This work has been particularly important to the citrus, strawberry, vegetable, small fruit, and tropical fruit industries. As new crops come on line, we will still need post harvest and handling work and dissemination of the results through an avenue such as FSHS.

With the rapid urbanization in Florida the environmental horticulture area with landscape management and nursery production will have increased needs for information. It is particularly baffling to me that with the tremendous growth in urban horticulture needs that FSHS has had trouble filling sections on this topic. What role will FSHS play in fostering the sharing and dissemination of this important information? It has been frustrating to recent FSHS BODs to see the difficulty of filling the papers in what were two sections of FSHS. Has FSHS been relevant to workers in these areas and to the end users of this information? What did they need that FSHS was not providing. What do they need that we should be providing?

What about new and emerging challenges? Florida is constantly under the threat and probably increasingly so for exotic pests and invasive species. We will hear about this topic in a few minutes from our keynote speaker. Is FSHS positioned to play a role in developing and disseminating new information on these topics? Is this an area where FSHS should reach out and perhaps partner with regulatory agencies and pest control and management technicians needing the latest information and a forum for sharing that information?

Recent surveys of the membership have pointed out the importance of grower interest and involvement in FSHS for FSHS to be successful in the future. The extension person in me tells me that should stay true as we search to define our relevance. We should do all we can to encourage and foster grower and industry involvement. That is one of the aspects that sets FSHS apart from other societies.

I think to be relevant, FSHS must do two things.

One, FSHS must continue to serve well its current members. Members have told us they value the annual meeting and the proceedings. We must make sure these two items continue to carry the respect and importance they have come to enjoy. Your BOD has worked very hard to make the annual meeting an enjoyable learning and sharing experience for its members. We have worked to keep the meeting costs as low as possible, yet still in a relaxing and enjoyable atmosphere. Your Local Arrangements Committees have been doing great work to add to that atmosphere. We also need to continue to add value to our meeting for the horticulture practitioners and growers. We need to continue to look for ways to combine in-service-training for county agents, Master Gardeners, and others. The current members share in this responsibility by encouraging colleagues who do not yet know FSHS to check us out. Share information with them about FSHS, who we are and what we do, and how by being a member can help them in their career. Everyone in the audience should feel the responsibility of introducing a new colleague to FSHS and encouraging them to participate. It is very hard work to maintain the relevance of a society like ours. We all need to share in that work.

We need to continue to do all we can do to make FSHS a place for students to be involved. The annual meeting should be a must for graduate students to learn about presenting research information. FSHS should be the place for horticulture workers to present and publish their research on issues

of more of a local or regional nature that might not be accepted nationally. This information still is important, valuable, and relevant and should be published in the Proceedings. I fear there are lots of FSHS presentations and Proceedings articles that are still in the file drawers around the state. Our Proceedings must continue to be strong and be published in a timely manner. Our Editor Ed Echevarria is working very hard on that aspect but he needs the help from timely manuscript submittal and review. FSHS is viewed as the place to go for research results in the state, in the region, and for that matter for tropical and subtropical areas in the world. I remember coming to Florida as a new Extension Specialist in vegetable production. I turned to the FSHS Proceedings as THE source for vegetable fertilization research on which to base updating our extension fertilization recommendations. Where will someone like me get that information if not for the FSHS Proceedings? We must make sure scientists and administrators understand and accept the properly placed (in the tenure and promotion process) importance of a publication like our FSHS Proceedings.

Should we be looking at how FSHS can use emerging communications technologies, such as web-based video-conferencing to multiple sites around the state for our annual meeting? I am not sure about the details of accomplishing this but simply ask the question can we do more to reach out to current and potential members? Maybe this is something for us to consider.

Secondly, FSHS must continue to reach out to new and exciting areas for involvement. We need to continue to build stronger diversity in membership, in program topics, and meeting format. As we reach out we will discover new members who find value in membership. Our annual program must reflect the need for information in these new and emerging areas. We must strive to include these topics in our program. This is a challenge to our hardworking sectional VPs to evaluate your sectional papers in this light, perhaps making a theme of one of your sessions that deals with a new and emerging topic. The fact that we are the FLORIDA State Horticultural Society should provide us with some ideas about how to stay relevant in our region of the world. We might consider doing more to reach out internationally, especially in the Caribbean region. There must be at least a few dozen potential members out there who have not yet learned about the relevance of FSHS to them. There are some members who might feel uncomfortable about increased international involvement, but done carefully, FSHS and its members and the people we serve in Florida should benefit from the increased knowledge and interaction. We will call on the members who work internationally and make presentations internationally to assist in getting the word out.

As I mentioned earlier we have merged two sections. This means the loss of 25 papers to our annual conference and Proceedings. Your BOD will be considering ways to keep the annual conference strong with a valuable proceedings publication. Should we consider replacing the lost section with a new one, perhaps a section on "New and Emerging Issues," that could change from year to year and perhaps be used to attract new conference participants and exciting speakers?

Another topic that has been discussed over the recent years is concurrent meetings with other groups and societies, such as the Soil and Crop Science Society of Florida. Does it make sense to meet together? Does it make sense, if the parties are willing, to somehow merge?

In the end FSHS is only as good as its membership and FSHS is only as relevant as its members will make it. FSHS is us. It is we horticulturists who make FSHS what it is. Are we content to continue on as an increasingly smaller group holding an increasingly smaller meeting, and publishing an increasingly smaller proceedings? Maybe this is the proper path, or maybe there is a bigger responsibility out there for us that we must identify, reach out to, and be relevant to. Your BOD is simply a group of dedicated volunteers who want to see FSHS stay relevant, and from what I have observed over the last year, this is true of your current BOD. But for FSHS to stay relevant and perhaps even grow it takes more than our BOD and a few other volunteers. It takes the proverbial village. It takes you. Everyone in this room has or will probably have an opportunity to get involved in the many committees that carry out the work of FSHS. In this way you are helping immensely and should feel proud of what you are doing for the society. We all are busy, but if FSHS is important to us,

then we will feel good about helping. Remember, a volunteer likes nothing more than another volunteer. Please volunteer to your society. The other way members can help is by telling others about FSHS and how FSHS can be relevant to them. Invite them to a meeting or have them look at our website to see how exciting and beneficial belonging to FSHS can be. At the very least every member should bear the responsibility of offering FSHS to potential new members.

If I said anything this morning of relevance it should be that all of us bear the responsibility of making FSHS relevant. I know I have benefited from my FSHS membership and sure you feel you have also. Just think of all the other horticulturists out there who should feel the same. Let's commit to making FSHS relevant to them. I know I speak on behalf of your BOD and especially for our Program Chairperson, Dr. Steve Sargent, I hope you have an enjoyable 118th meeting of the Florida State Horticultural Society. Let's all have fun, and then please share that experience with a colleague next time.