

Baron Shively
President, Kansas Section, SRM
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In writing this “epistle”, I really felt challenged trying to find some subject to write about which would make me sound erudite and wise. Well, obviously that ain’t going to happen. Finally I had one of those “duh” moments when I realized that being challenged is what it’s all about.

If you’ve been feeling challenged lately, you have good reason. Our country is undergoing perhaps its biggest challenge in our 220 plus years of existence. We have enemies unlike any we’ve ever fought. Their greatest goal is to die trying to bring our country down, a concept that is totally alien to the American pioneer heritage of survival against all odds.

Those of us involved directly or indirectly in agriculture see how challenged the farmer and rancher are just to survive economically. “When the price is up you don’t have a crop and when the price is down the bins are full” certainly holds true this year. Many of us have been challenged by drought conditions the likes of which haven’t been seen for 70 years.

Those of us employed by USDA or on the receiving end of government programs are struggling to get a handle on the new farm bill programs. Most of the time it seems like we are trying to play a game in which nobody knows the rules at the start of the game and they keep getting changed as the game goes on. And rest assured there are penalties for infractions of the rules!

Teaching and research professionals are challenged by low budgets and ever increasing demands on time.

SRM faces many challenges. Where are the membership numbers we once enjoyed? We have a lot to contribute to those managing and utilizing grassland resources, but how do we reach them? Nor is our organization on easy street financially. We are even facing the challenge of whether to change our name and logo or sticking with the old ones.

If I am sounding pessimistic, that’s not my intention. People who make their living off the land are the biggest optimists in the world and there’s too much farmer and rancher blood in my veins to get down for too long.

There’s a good deal to be optimistic about. When Americans keep their priorities straight, we are unbeatable. We’ve chased a bunch of rats out of their holes in Afghanistan and we’ll get the rest in time. The “powers that be” in USDA will get their act straightened out and with the allocations for the new programs, it will be “Katie bar the door!” We’ll get a lot of work done in the next few years.

I firmly believe that SRM will always be a leading natural resources organization no matter what we call ourselves or what logo appears on the letterhead. We will have good leaders and they will see us through these challenges. Even membership is starting back up nationally. Most of all, I also know all of you well enough to know that we are up for the challenge.