

# CAST — A VOICE FOR AGRICULTURE

by Laura DeBoer, CAST Editorial Project Manager

**T**he Council for Agricultural Science and Technology (CAST) is a nonprofit organization composed of 36 scientific societies and many individual, student, company, nonprofit, and associate society members.

Unlike so many organizations today that market sensationalism and political bias under the guise of "agricultural fact," CAST's only "agenda" since its inception has been to compile and communicate objective, science-based information. The CAST mission is to assemble, interpret, and communicate credible science-based information regionally, nationally, and internationally to legislators, regulators, policymakers, the media, the private sector, and the public.

In 1970, a planning committee was convened by the **National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences** to discuss "The Role of Agricultural Scientific Societies." Representatives of 16 scientific societies met to discuss the new organization. The consensus was to pursue further "the idea of an independent association of the agricultural science societies." In 1972, CAST was chartered in Iowa as a nonprofit corporation for "charitable, educational, and scientific purposes."

During the nearly 37 years since it was chartered, CAST has grown from an initial group of seven founding scientific societies to its current membership of 36 societies. Representatives from each of these organizations, along with an executive committee, form the CAST Board of Directors. CAST relies on the dedication, energy, and scientific expertise of its volunteer directors to identify and select topics for publications and to help carry out the CAST mission.

## PEER REVIEWED PAPERS

CAST has an impressive record of publications since its founding. The publications are written and peer-reviewed by volunteer task force of experts such as scientists, profession-

als, and specialists in the field. CAST also produces a weekly e-mail newsletter, "*Friday Notes*," which is sent to all members to keep them updated on current pertinent agricultural information.

CAST publishes different types of publications for different audi-

ences or uses. For example, CAST prepared a Special Publication about Avian Influenza Vaccines, in conjunction with USAID, which was used primarily by public administration officials. CAST then excerpted a portion of the document into a CAST Commentary to cover the most important aspects in a shorter version for legislators and regulators. The types of CAST publications include:



(L to R) CAST President-elect Todd Peterson, President Henry Shands, Past President Kassim Al-Khatib, and former Presidents Ed Runge, Stanley Fletcher, and Harold Coble. (Inset) CAST Executive Vice President Dr. John Bonner (l) with Norman Borlaug at the World Food Prize in Des Moines, IA.



international impact. For example, 50 different media outlets picked up the story of a CAST Issue Paper "*The Safety of Meat, Milk, and Eggs from Animals Fed Crops Derived from Biotechnology*" within 5 days of publication. Another CAST Issue Paper, "*The Role of Transgenic Livestock in the Development of New Medications*," was covered by top news media, including the *Boston Globe*, *CBS News*, *Fox News*, the *New York Times*, and *USA Today*.

Forthcoming CAST publications include three CAST Commentaries, seven Issue Papers, and one Special Publication; topics cover air, water, and land issues associated with agriculture; transgenic and cloned animals; bioenergy; endangered species and agriculture; energy flow in agricultural systems; ethical and animal welfare implications of animal

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biotechnology; food, fuel, and plant nutrient use; food safety; soybean production systems; and water, people, and the future.

The CAST Web site offers further details about forthcoming publications and provides access to dozens of Issue Papers and CAST Commentaries, offered for free to increase distribution and impact. The Web site also features a "ClustrMap" that shows how often and from where the Web site is accessed. For its first year, ending mid-January 2009, the site was accessed more than 26,000 times by individuals from 151 different countries.

## AG EDUCATION

Evidence of CAST's desire to have an ongoing impact on agricultural issues is its involvement with agricultural education. The CAST Graduate School Education Program "started as an offering of CAST's 'Friday Notes' to all graduate students and has now been broadened to a program for all faculty and staff as well," notes CAST Executive Vice President **Dr. John Bonner**.

"We offer the program to all universities and would hope that more would join in making this service available to their students and staff."

CAST also is a Champion Plus sponsor of **National Ag Day**, an annual program that includes specific components to encourage young people to consider career opportunities in agriculture, includ-

ing student visits to Capitol Hill and a student essay contest.

A recent addition to CAST's educational commitment is Dr. Bonner's participation on the author committee for the National Research Council's new report, "*Transforming Agricultural Education for a Changing World*," that proposes nine steps for institutions to attract top students and prepare them for the challenges of tomorrow.

CAST has been fortunate to receive the ongoing support of influential individuals who understand the importance of CAST's mission to communicate the science of agriculturally related topics. From scientists to politicians to educators, CAST is well respected for its work.

Like all nonprofit organizations, CAST relies on a variety of funding sources to support its activities. Throughout the 37-year history of CAST, a number of fundraising strategies and development initiatives have been used by staff members and volunteer board members. The current plan, developed and implemented by Dr. Bonner, outlines



CAST's headquarters building in Ames, IA.

how agricultural scientists, companies, nonprofit organizations, scientific societies, and individuals can provide the "Three I's" that are essential to maintaining CAST: Input, Impact, and Investment.

Stakeholders provide input for future publications on topics of importance to agriculture nationwide and worldwide.

They broaden the impact of CAST by communicating CAST information to colleagues and customers.

Stakeholders to provide the investment necessary to support the activities of CAST. CAST is challenged by rising costs, an increasing number of company mergers, fewer members, and less available funding.

Since its founding, CAST and the many scientists it represents have provided a strong, consistent voice for food and agricultural science through publications, presentations, and outreach activities. CAST has partnered with many outstanding organizations, both private and governmental, to communicate science-based information to a widening audience of its stakeholders. CAST will strive to continue its mission and meet its responsibility to provide information about the scientific and technological landscape of food, agricultural, and environmental issues.

To find out more about CAST, become a member, view a complete list of publications, or to propose a publication, visit the Web site at [www.cast-science.org](http://www.cast-science.org). **AM**

## COMMENTARY

"We obviously have a critical need now, more than any time in the past, for CAST's accurate, concise, science-based information. ... CAST specializes in bringing together the knowledge and experience of scientists, summarizing it for broad impact, then communicating it locally and internationally. I have no doubt that CAST will continue with this mission another 36 years and beyond."

— **Dr. Norman Borlaug** — Winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Congressional Gold Medal; widely known as the "Father of the Green Revolution"; supporter and promoter of CAST since its beginning

"CAST plays a crucial role in gathering and distilling scientific information on food and agricultural topics, and making it more accessible and understandable to the public and to policymakers. Everyone wins when the scientific community provides informed analysis to assist the public debate on food and agricultural issues."

— **Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA)** — Chairman, Senate Agriculture Committee