Balance

Spring has sprung in many places. This has been a particularly hard winter with colder temperatures and more snow/rain than in recent years in a lot of locations. Tornadoes have hit areas during seasons when we do not usually expect them. As the weather is warming up, we are seeing major flooding in regions as the snow melts. I would guess that most of us are glad to see spring and the accompanying warmer temperatures, but not the potential negative results of those temperatures in combination with the remainder of the hard winter.

As I have watched the flooding videos from Nebraska, I have pondered. Why is it that in most years the seasons pass and we see little flooding, but then this year we are seeing major flooding impacts. I recognize that each year is different with different weather patterns and that over time we have learned to adjust to the patterns to try to minimize effects.

I ponder these things in my “spare” time. Like most faculty and administrators, my work year has “seasons”. From December until about May is the “deadline season”. There are the big deadlines that we know are coming, then there are the pesky small deadlines that get imposed in addition to the major deadlines. Faculty members with teaching appointments are now trying to wind down the semester for their students while they are also trying to gear up their research for the summer. Extension folks are starting to get more questions and also invitations to do presentations on “what’s wrong with my plant”, among other topics. Yes, it is a busy time of the year for horticulturists.

I often feel overwhelmed by the deadlines. I told my associate dean earlier this year that it feels like I am on a roller coaster at the bottom of the ocean. I work my way up and up on one side. My head almost gets above the water, then I go crashing down the other side to the bottom to start over again. How do we get through this stress of feeling like there is too much to do?

My only answer is to find a balance in our life. Yes, work responsibilities are important. But each of us is important too. We must find ways to take care of ourselves or we will not be productive or desirable to be around. Part of taking care of ourselves is finding the things that we enjoy (in addition to work) and take a break from the hectic work time to do something else. In my case this is travelling, hiking, geocaching, and generally being outdoors, but not doing required things. Instead, doing the things I want to do on my own schedule.

Sometimes when we have so many deadlines, we feel guilty about taking that time out to do something we enjoy. Have you ever noticed that when you come back from a few days off work you are often far more productive than you were for weeks, or even months, before that vacation? Time off can definitely be a way to re-inspire one’s self.

So my challenge to you is this. Find something that you enjoy and that can give you a break from the stresses of trying to get everything done at once. It is important for your personal well-being and also for your productivity. I try to take my own advice as much as possible on this topic. I hope you do too.