Why Aren’t You Publishing in the ASHS Journals?

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As with my first three “Reflections” columns, this topic came to me after an experience/conversation. In a recent conversation with ASHS’ Tracy Shawn, she said a re-occurring question she hears from younger members is “Why should I publish in the ASHS journals?” She added that people seem to be “shopping” for the best vehicles to publish their work and are asking for tangible reasons why ASHS journals are their best choice. I certainly had my ideas, but I thought I would ask other ASHS members who have written numerous articles in our journals.

I did ask some friends, but also a number of people I have never met. Among these are long-time members, and some very new members. I asked mostly domestic, but some international, authors. Some of the published work is basic science, but also technology transfer, education, and extension publications—authors who publish in all three journals. I simply asked, “Why do you publish in one of our journals?” I have listed the ASHS members who responded to this question at the end of this column, and I genuinely thank them for their thoughts. I will put some ideas in quotes—not implying one specific person said this—but as a general thought said by a number of the respondents.

One of the most frequent replies concerned the reputation and the quality of the ASHS journals, and the audience. “The ASHS journals are among the most respected journals in horticulture with high-quality papers, and these are the journals read by my peers.” The journals contain papers written by horticulturalists for horticulturalists. This puts the information into the hands of the people who can best use it, whether it be basic research, technology transfer, education, or outreach. In addition, horticulturists are the people who can best evaluate the information presented in the three journals.

“There is an ASHS journal for everyone. They are positioned such that almost all of your work can find a home in one of them.” The Journal of the American Society for Horticultural Science features mission-oriented, fundamental research on various aspects of horticultural science, and is considered by many of the respondents the flagship journal for horticultural science. HortScience provides information on significant research, education, extension findings and methods, and developments and trends that affect the profession. HortTechnology brings reliable, current, peer-reviewed technical information to help solve problems and deal with current challenges in production, education, and extension. HortTechnology is also one of the few journals that publishes well-conducted cultivar trials that are especially beneficial to extension specialists making recommendations to growers. “ASHS respects the effort and time that goes into developing a new cultivar and understands the needs for publishing within the academic community.”
Perhaps the most frequent response was “publishing in the journals is simple and efficient. Manuscript review is quick, review is transparent, journal editors and staff are easy to communicate with, and are responsive.” The review process is clear and fast, and once a paper is accepted, the work is available for other horticulturalists in a relatively short period. I received many comments on the short time after submission that authors received comments. I found it interesting how often I heard that reviews were not only timely, but also on target. The editors find appropriate reviewers with a thorough understanding of the subject. On a personal note, I just finished a review of a manuscript for one of our journals, and the decision was made 17 days after I accepted the review.

There were also quite a number of responses about loyalty to ASHS. “ASHS is my professional society and I want to publish in its journals. These are high-quality peer-reviewed journals, and I want to do right by the society and support it by contributing my work.” Many mentioned attending the ASHS Annual Conference and then publishing what they presented in one of the journals, and then looking in the journals for information from others who presented talks or posters at the conference. I also believe it is important that you can see authors, coauthors, and editors at the ASHS Annual Conference. This is especially important for our younger/newer members, as they can see that these are real people, with whom they can make connections, and they are horticulturists.

I have been in a university my entire career (we will not say how long, but I started just after the Earth’s crust became solid), and when considered for advancement, journals we published in were evaluated by their rejection rate. By this criterion, my papers in the Society journals were highly regarded. However, times are different (I review many promotion and tenure packets) and today impact factor is the driving force—and the impact factors for our journals is not a high as we would like. This is certainly changing since our journals are all becoming open access, and many more people can now easily find, read, and cite articles from our journals.

To me the important point is that the quality of the papers published in the ASHS journals is very high, and it is important to get your work into the hands of people who will use it. Back to promotion—a horticulturist, outside your institution, is most likely going to evaluate your promotion packet. Thus, other horticulturalists should know you, and one of the best ways is to publish in the journals that they read. I believe the question is really “Why aren’t you publishing in the ASHS journals?”

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