

A happy birthday

Agricultural Alumni Association celebrates 20 years

"Don't undertake a project unless it is manifestly important or nearly impossible."

—Edwin H. Land

Surely this statement was on the minds of Oklahoma State University graduates when the Agricultural Alumni Association was formed in 1983.

For years, graduates of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources knew something must be done for alumni to stay connected with each other and their alma mater after commencement.

Max Berry, a 1957 agricultural economics graduate and chairman of the "Committee of Twenty," remembers how the Agricultural Alumni Association became a reality.

"Information was presented to us about other agricultural alumni associations around the nation," Berry said. "We felt the college, students, and we, as alumni, were missing out on opportunities that alumni at places like Purdue, Ohio State and Michigan State were taking advantage of."

The "Committee of Twenty" was formed in 1983 to develop the CASNR Alumni Association. The committee actually consisted of 21 CASNR alumni.

"Before the committee members were selected, it was decided to be The Committee of Twenty," said Dirk Webb, 1978 agricultural education graduate and member of

the Committee of Twenty. "Then the Dean's office released the names of the committee members and 21 names were on the list. I guess we could not count."

This selected group of CASNR alumni took the initiative to develop the OSU Agricultural Alumni Association.

A CASNR graduate was selected from each department to be a representative on the committee and represent his or her discipline, said Webb.

Wesley Holley, former executive secretary of the OSU Agricultural Alumni Association, contacted committee members to meet in his office to discuss a vision for the association, Berry said. Lack of members and funding made the early going difficult.

"Our goal, as a committee, was to form a common bond to bring agricultural alumni back to the college and show the bonds of the students and agriculture," said Webb.

Berry said the Agricultural Alumni Association knew what it wanted to accomplish, but the majority of the members at the time were farmers who didn't have a lot of time.

"At first, we sent out mailings to in-state alumni, hoping they would come to meetings," Berry said. "But progress was slow."

In 1983, 50 to 60 members were involved in the association. The group grew to more than 100 people in the second year when the charter was signed.

"At the time, the committee members felt like there were many agricultural related fields, other than just farming, students were taking advantage of," Berry said. "These people were concerned with the future of agriculture, and they became the motivators of the association."

During the past 20 years, the Agricultural Alumni Association has grown to more than 3,500 members. Now, on its 20th birthday, the OSU Agricultural Alumni Association has become what its founders aspired it to be.

"Today, the alumni association is doing exactly what they set out to do 20 years ago," said Ed Miller, College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources associate dean. "They are working for the students."

Miller said the Agricultural Alumni Association has always had this vision, but during the last five years its goals have been met because of increased membership and motivated members.

"The alumni association has always had the desire to do more for the students, but two things have limited it: budget and direction," said Miller. "Now, we have been able to accomplish things we have always wanted through increased membership."

Holley, now the associate dean and associate director of the College of Agriculture at New Mexico State University, said the alumni association is the key mechanism for communication among graduates.

"The association keeps alumni informed about what is going on in the college," Holley said. "It plays a vital role in providing feedback to the college."

Agricultural Alumni Association members not only advise the college about what is working well, but also they provide insight on changes that could be made for CASNR to evolve with the times, said Holley.

Holley said the Agricultural Alumni Association has evolved into a vehicle that is dedicated to working for the students, as well as the college, by becoming a vital recruiting tool.

"Over the last few years, the Agricultural Alumni Association has developed a consensus among board members by cen-



OSU Agricultural Alumni Association members enjoy good food and good conversation during the annual Homecoming barbecue Oct. 18, 2003. (Photo by Todd Johnson)

tering on supporting and recruiting students," said Holley.

The Agricultural Alumni Association barbecue on Homecoming Saturday is an event that allows members to gather and share ideas about CASNR's future.

"The barbecue gives alumni a chance to talk about what is good for the college

while enjoying themselves in a friendly atmosphere," said Linda Martin, CASNR assistant dean and the Agricultural Alumni Association executive secretary.

The Agricultural Alumni Association has gained momentum through its members' increased involvement and this gives the association the opportunity to achieve its goals

of increased student involvement, she said.

"We hope to get more feedback from our alumni about what is working and what could be better," Miller said. "We also would like to funnel more money to students via recognition programs, as well as make more opportunities available in career services through internships and job placement for our graduates."

The vision the founders had in 1983 has allowed the OSU Agricultural Alumni Association to transform into the organization it has become today.

"Everything we set out to do in 1983 is happening now," Miller said. "We are working for the students and the college is benefiting. Now we are focusing on how to make it better."

Graduates seeking information about OSU Agricultural Alumni Association membership can inquire in 136 Agricultural Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078 or visit the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources' Web site at <http://www.casnr.com> ♦ *By Jared Robison, Ringwood, Okla.*



Scott Landgraf (left) and Jack Pritchard discuss the future of the Agricultural Alumni Association. (Photo by Todd Johnson)