President-elect

(to serve as president 2023–2024)

Laura Wayne

The summer of 2005 was life changing for me: I met my husband-to-be, and I was also awarded a Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF). Along with the SURF stipend came a 1-year membership to ASPB. ASPB has provided me with a professional community, a place to network and meet other scientists, and an edge on the latest research and technology. Recognizing how ASPB helped launch my career, I am passionate about giving back to this society and mentoring the next generation of plant scientists. To get more involved in these efforts, I joined the Women in Plant Biology committee (WiPB) in 2014. As Chair of WiPB (2017-2020), I strengthened connections to the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) committee as we led joint workshops on implicit bias, hosted networking events, and introduced a webinar series on Leadership.

ASPB's drive to change and adapt is impressive. Recently, we welcomed the Early Career Plant Scientists Section, and ASPB has expanded EDI from a single committee to working toward embedding EDI into every aspect of the organization. The nimbleness of response to cultural and societal events sends a clear message that everyone belongs, and everyone is heard. It is essential for us to be more than passive allies; we all need to be activists and accomplices in driving toward a more equitable and inclusive society.

Currently, I am the Oils Discovery Leader at Corteva Agriscience (merger of Dow AgroSciences and DuPont Pioneer) and lead a small discovery team operating at the interface between basic and applied plant science. My overall research interest is in studying the underlying mechanisms of plant metabolism to produce sustainable bioproducts. I majored in Biotechnology at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY-ESF). The SURF research project developed into a senior thesis on characterizing guard-cell-specific genes in Arabidopsis. During my PhD at Washington State University, I investigated the electron supply to fatty acid desaturases and hydroxylase with the long-term goal of improving production of industrial oils. Through the NIH Protein Biotechnology traineeship, I did an internship at Metabolix (now Yield10 Bioscience) to produce biodegradable bioplastics. In 2012, I joined Dow AgroSciences where my research focus is on discovering traits for creating healthier oils and improving overall seed composition. Additionally, I lead the R&D EDI Recruiting Taskforce for Corteva.

In 2018, I was asked to run for President of ASPB. Honestly, it was unnerving to compete against a renowned R1 full professor, but I felt compelled to show especially young women that we should not underestimate ourselves. Regardless of the election outcome, I resolved to continue my initiatives for ASPB. Although I did not win, I was asked to be a "provocateur" at the summer council meeting, where I proposed three items: (1) We include early career representatives on each committee with full voting participation. (2) We develop mentoring programs. (3) We better engage with the public through communicating our personal story (e.g., Story Collider).

We now have early career representatives on all committees, including Council and nominations committee. Through WiPB, I helped develop the Plantae Mentoring Center. When it launched in 2019, I hosted a webinar on How to be an Effective Mentor with a focus on mentoring underrepresented minorities. I mentor one or two students/postdocs at any given time and have hosted five student interns at Corteva.

Transparency is a path toward equity. In 2019, I advocated for increased transparency with the nomination process. This provocation led to an ad-hoc committee, which updated the nominations process and inspired Judy Callis' Transparency Project. Speaking out on this issue may have helped me get elected to represent the Council on the Board of Directors in 2020. One of the most difficult decisions ASPB has made, was to discontinue self-publishing. Ultimately, we chose Oxford University Press as the publisher for *The Plant Cell* and *Plant Physiology* (see FAQ). When it became evident that the Washington DC Plant Biology gathering needed to be canceled, we decided to host a completely virtual Plant Biology Worldwide Summit. While not ideal, virtual options have allowed many more people to participate.

I am currently on the Centennial Challenge committee, where we are fundraising to ensure programs like SURF continue. I believe I have a lot more to give to this society, especially to the next generation of ASPB leaders. I hope to continue increasing mentoring opportunities, such as expanding/upgrading the Plantae Mentoring Center and developing a conference buddy program so new attendees feel welcomed. We as scientists need to do a better job of sharing our stories to make our research personal and relatable to everyone, especially as we seek public support for CRISPR-editing technology and research funding. Lastly, I plan to listen to your ideas, advocate on your behalf, and create a collaborative environment that values all contributions, regardless of level or institution.