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The United States Agricultural Information Network: Accomplishments through Strategic Collaboration

ANTOINETTE PARIS GREIDER AND BARBARA S. HUTCHINSON

ABSTRACT

For more than thirty years the United States Agricultural Information Network (USAIN) has been a major player in the dissemination and preservation of agricultural information. Beginning as a network of institutions, USAIN early on restructured to an individual-based organization. As a community of practice, USAIN members conduct work through committees and interest groups and maintain close communication through a variety of outlets. Biennial conferences offer face-to-face networking opportunities, and conference scholarships have been successful in engaging potential new members directly in organizational activities. The results of a survey of scholarship winners provide insights into perceptions of the organization and the benefits of membership. Through the years, USAIN also has initiated and supported projects that have helped build a more efficient and effective agricultural information system to inform and educate a broad range of audiences involved in the areas of agriculture, food, and nutrition. These include a national preservation program, a national text-digitizing project, the AGRICOLA database, and the Agriculture Network Information Collaborative (AgNIC). This paper chronicles the history of the organization and the impact it has had on agricultural information professionals and national agricultural information initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

The United States Agricultural Information Network (USAIN) is an organization “for information professionals that provides a forum for discussion of agricultural issues, takes a leadership role in the formation of a

national information policy as related to agriculture, makes recommendations to the National Agricultural Library on agricultural information matters, and promotes cooperation and communication among its members” (USAIN, 2016c, n.p.¹). It has provided these services to the agricultural information community for nearly three decades and continues to be a vital organization serving the needs of its members.² As with most organizations, USAIN’s history has been an evolving story populated by diverse players. USAIN began as a much different entity than what it is today. However, it is because of its ability to adapt and change to the needs of its constituency that it continues to play a strategic and important role for its individual and institutional membership. A chronicle of USAIN’s progress reveals two distinct periods of development: one that focused on bringing together a network of institutions and organizations, and the other that coalesced as an organization of individuals.

NETWORK OF INSTITUTIONS

An informal agricultural information network is a long tradition. Land grant libraries and the National Agricultural Library (NAL) have worked together “in varying degrees of effectiveness” since the early 1900s. The NAL did recognize the need to formalize the relationship and in the late 1960s, with the aid of EDUCOM, developed a network development plan which was submitted to NAL for implementation in 1969.³ Although an Agricultural Sciences Information Network Committee was appointed in 1970, and a Conference for Implementation of the Agricultural Science Information Network took place in 1975, efforts to create a viable network were not successful. The 1977 Farm Bill contained language strongly supporting cooperative agricultural information activities, but funding that would have secured the existence of an agricultural information network never materialized. (Thomas, 1989a, pp. 113–114)

The Farm Act of 1977 specifically charged the National Agricultural Library (NAL) to develop a library and information network that would coordinate agricultural libraries of colleges and universities and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) libraries, while in close conjunction with private industry and other research libraries. As a result, the Agricultural Information Conference was held in Washington, D.C., in 1979 in conjunction with the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC). The conference brought together librarians from government, academia, and industry, as well as directors of the Cooperative Extension Service, with the intent to formulate an agricultural information network (Kennedy, 1980). Discussions continued with little result until 1982, when retiring NAL director Richard Farley convened an interagency blue-ribbon panel to assess NAL programs and services and provide a way forward (J. Howard, personal communication, December 31, 2015). The final report to the Secretary of Agriculture once

again recommended the development of a nationwide agricultural information network (Interagency Panel, 1982).

Shortly after issuing the panel's report there was a change in leadership at NAL, and in 1982 Joseph Howard of the Library of Congress was appointed as acting director of NAL:

As I recall, in 1982, as Richard Farley was retiring as NAL's director, the Department of Agriculture asked that the Library of Congress provide someone to serve on a "Blue Ribbon Panel" to provide guidance as to how NAL could operate more effectively. I was chosen as the one to be on the panel. One of the recommendations concerned the re-emergence of the concept of an agricultural information network. On the completion of the blue ribbon report and upon Director Farley's retirement, the Department of Agriculture asked that I be loaned for six months to head NAL until a new director could be appointed. Ultimately I was appointed [in 1983] and I worked hard in establishing what eventually became USAIN. (Joseph Howard, personal communication, December 31, 2015)

As mentioned above, NAL had been working toward a network even prior to Howard's appointment as director. In January 1973 a memorandum of understanding was established for the "designation of the state land-grant libraries as repositories for the land-grant agricultural publications of their respective states [and] discussion of the possibility of microfilming land-grant agricultural publications continued" (Garrett & Luchsinger, 1980, p. 511). The first microfilming agreement was signed in July 1975 to film the documents of the New England States: Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The agreement provided for the sharing of microfilming costs, with copies of the film made for both NAL and the participating libraries, as well as an archival negative to be kept at NAL. In 1974 NAL partnered with the land-grant libraries to provide resources to USDA field personnel through a regional document-delivery system, and in 1977 NAL brought together land-grant and corporate librarians to discuss cooperation among their libraries (Marshall, 1978). Then, in 1983, NAL's director, Howard, began the Co-operative Cataloging Project. Working with OCLC,⁴ a network of mainly land-grant university libraries cooperatively cataloged agricultural monographs, which went into the AGRICOLA database as well as the OCLC database. This project officially began in 1986 with Cornell University, Ohio State University, and Texas A&M University (Collins, 1992). Also in 1986, NAL took a leadership role to determine if it were possible to provide enhanced access to the agricultural literature while preserving it from rapid deterioration by utilizing the latest technology. This led to the National Agricultural Text Digitizing Project (NATDP), which ultimately involved forty-two land-grant libraries (André & Eaton, 1988).

In 1987 the *National Agricultural Library Information Network: Outline of a Plan* was developed by NAL at the request of the NASULGC's subcom-

mittee on Agricultural Information. This twenty-page document detailed possible areas of cooperation among land-grant universities, historically black colleges and universities, the McIntire-Stennis Forestry School Libraries, veterinary medical libraries, USDA, state and federal libraries and information centers, rural public libraries, special libraries in agribusiness and industry, and international agricultural information systems. The plan called for NAL to act as a coordinator for the network, and to “take the lead in seeking authority and appropriations, as well as other funding, to support development of the network and its components” (*National Agricultural Library Information Network: Outline of a Plan*, qtd. in Thomas, 1989a, p. 114). In 1988 a nominating committee composed of leaders of the land-grant community was assembled by NAL to solicit nominations for officers of the unnamed network and to produce a slate of candidates. This was accomplished, and ballots were sent to all land-grant library directors. The result was the establishment of the first leadership group, ultimately called the Executive Council. It set out to develop the foundation for this new network, and by 1989 the organization was officially named and bylaws codified. In 1990 the members of the second Executive Council were elected, and it is this group that organized and held the first USAIN conference (Thomas, 1989a).

Foundational Years, 1989–1995

It was clearly articulated by Director Howard from the beginning that USAIN was not to be a division of NAL, but an advocacy and advisory group similar to the National Library of Medicine’s Friends group.⁵ This would fulfill the blue-ribbon panel’s recommendation for an agricultural information network, and partially satisfy the recommendation for an advisory council (Interagency Panel, 1982). NAL would be an equal affiliate of USAIN, serving as a permanent ad hoc member of the Executive Council. In this capacity NAL would secure support for the network and organize collaborative initiatives, such as cooperative collection development and other similar ventures (USAIN, 1988). The organization would be a network largely of institutions and organizations, with minimal overlap with the American Library Association (ALA) and the Special Libraries Association (SLA). While both associations had forums for discussion, at the time there was no single group specifically targeted for agricultural librarians that considered significant issues facing the agricultural information specialist.⁶ The Executive Council was to be drawn from the land-grant community, from other institutions with an agricultural interest, and from individual members representing the profession who were also members of NASULGC (Thomas, 1989a). In addition, there would be an assembly for the institutions to discuss the larger issues, as well as interest groups for individual members to share knowledge and explore opportunities for collaborative efforts. It was a conscious decision to make membership

affordable, given member's involvement in other professional organizations. Thus dues were set at a modest \$100 for institutions and \$10 for individuals.⁷ Council members would be elected by the membership, but the group itself would elect the officers (USAIN, 1988).

During the early years the presidents of USAIN were directors of libraries from the land-grant and agribusiness communities. At this time USAIN's focus was largely on its advocacy role for NAL and services to the land-grant community. In this role USAIN's leaders worked to support appropriations for NAL by providing testimony to Congress. This strategy was instrumental in restoring funding to NAL in 1989 (Thomas, 1989b). The Executive Council also coordinated the crafting of *A Preservation Plan for Agricultural Literature* and solicited support from the directors of the land-grant libraries to implement it. This resulted in securing a seed grant from the Council on Library Resources (CLR) and Cargill Inc. for the initiative (R. Frank, 1993).⁸ In addition, while NATDP had been ongoing since 1986, USAIN supported the expansion of this pilot project to a national-level program, and a technical advisory panel within USAIN was created to guide the effort. The project was largely funded by the land-grant libraries (Eaton & André, 1992).

Through these coordinated efforts USAIN thrived and NAL gained new momentum and support. However, in 1993 the work of the National Partnership for Reinventing Government (NPR)⁹ changed these dynamics, and with it the future of both NAL and USAIN. USDA proposed a consolidation of NAL, Cooperative Extension Service, Agricultural Research Service, and Cooperative State Research Services into a division that would report to the third level of the Secretary of Agriculture's Office (USAIN, 1993). This essentially meant that NAL would lose its ability to present and advocate for its own annual budget to Congress. USAIN leaders expressed concern and made attempts to prevent this repositioning, but in the end NAL became part of the Agricultural Research Service. This move drastically limited NAL's ability to achieve its national mandate because it no longer had access to cabinet-level decision making in USDA. Concurrently, the directors of the land-grant libraries needed to turn their attention to other initiatives during a time of considerable downsizing, which resulted in a decline in engagement with USAIN, as well as with NASULGC. This in turn caused a precipitous decline in institutional membership. By 1996 USAIN had only four institutional members remaining, although it continued to have strong individual memberships, then numbering ninety-two members (USAIN, 1996).¹⁰

USAIN Restructured, 1995–2000

As the first USAIN leaders transitioned out of the organization and funding through NAL and outside commercial contributions was more limited, it became apparent that USAIN would have to reconsider its focus if it

was to survive. This became especially apparent at the USAIN Executive Council meeting held in January 1995 in Philadelphia. The only council members who attended the meeting were two newly elected directors—the authors of this paper—along with NAL liaison Robyn Frank. After talking to the current president, Cynthia Via, by telephone and gaining her insights into the state of the organization, it became clear that a new structure would be needed. There was agreement that USAIN as an organization could be beneficial beyond the advocacy and policy level by providing working agricultural librarians with a forum for coordinating efforts, developing collaborative projects, networking, and professional development. Ultimately, discussions at the meeting laid the groundwork to recast the organization from an *institution*-based organization to an *individual*-based one. In essence the responsibility for running the organization would now be in the hands of individual members. At the 1995 USAIN conference held in Lexington, Kentucky, a new USAIN leadership emerged that was not constituted of high-level administrators or directors of corporate information centers, but rather working agricultural information professionals largely from land-grant libraries but also from business and government agencies. While this new Executive Council built on the already established identity of USAIN as a professional organization, as well as its already considerable record of accomplishment for facilitating collaboration and greater understanding of agricultural information issues, it focused on the future in the development of a formal action plan that would guide organizational activities to the year 2000. This five-year plan, based on input gained from member surveys, included the following goals (USAIN, 1995a):

- Strengthening membership and increasing participation in USAIN by members and other agricultural information professionals
- Advocating for public policy, legislation, and institutional change that enhance the values and contributions of the agricultural research and information communities
- Providing educational and professional-development opportunities for agricultural information specialists

Each goal had specific tasks that were to be overseen by various Executive Council members and implemented by task forces and interest groups. Beginning in 1997 the goals, and progress made toward fulfilling them, were reviewed at each meeting of the Executive Council and reported out to the membership annually (USAIN, 1997).

Along with the detailed action plan, the Executive Council took a hard look at its makeup and streamlined the group in both size and balance. A line of succession was built into the election process by eliminating the vice-president position in favor of a president-elect so that the business of

the organization would not be interrupted with a complete change in officers. The office of “past president” was added to give even more continuity to the leadership. The task of organizing the nominating committee fell to the past president, as it was felt that this officer would know the type of skills needed to meet goals and be able to articulate the commitment to nominees for the various offices.¹¹

All of this required a comprehensive review of the organizational bylaws that resulted in a completely new draft that was circulated to the members and approved by the membership in July 1996. Also during these years, it became obvious that the extensive clerical work necessary to run an organization was a crushing burden to a now all-volunteer organization. As a result, in 1999 the USAIN Executive Council signed a contract with the management firm Long and Associates to administer the day-to-day operations of the organization. In addition, in 2000 USAIN became a 501c3 organization with a permanent address and contact information. These management decisions were vital to stabilizing and growing the organization. Greater engagement was also achieved with the formation of new interest groups (for example, Changing Information Environment, AgNIC,¹² Social Issues) and through the strategic use of a variety of communications mechanisms. These steps provided a framework for operations that has, to the authors’ minds, stood the test of time and allowed the organization to thrive during times of considerable change for the agricultural information profession.¹³ (For a chronology of events detailed in this section, see appendix I.)

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE¹⁴

To gain a broader understanding of the impact of USAIN as a community of practice on the profession, and to verify our own perceptions of it as a successful organization both in its original form and as it has evolved, we pursued two avenues of inquiry. First, we conducted an analysis of its operational structure over time; and second, we distributed a survey to the recipients of the USAIN Conference Scholarship Award. We felt that the latter would provide insights into individual perceptions of the organization and its ability to engage and grow its membership. At the same time, we believe that USAIN’s structural changes have created a stable foundation that encourages involvement, and that also ensures that it remains relevant to institutional and individual members. While the original focus of the organization was on the institutional level, even the earliest discussions demonstrated a commitment to individual members by creating “interest groups that would focus on specific functional areas” (USAIN, 1988, n.p.). (See fig. 1.)

Interest groups, along with the committees, have formed the basis for engagement by individual members. The direct involvement of these

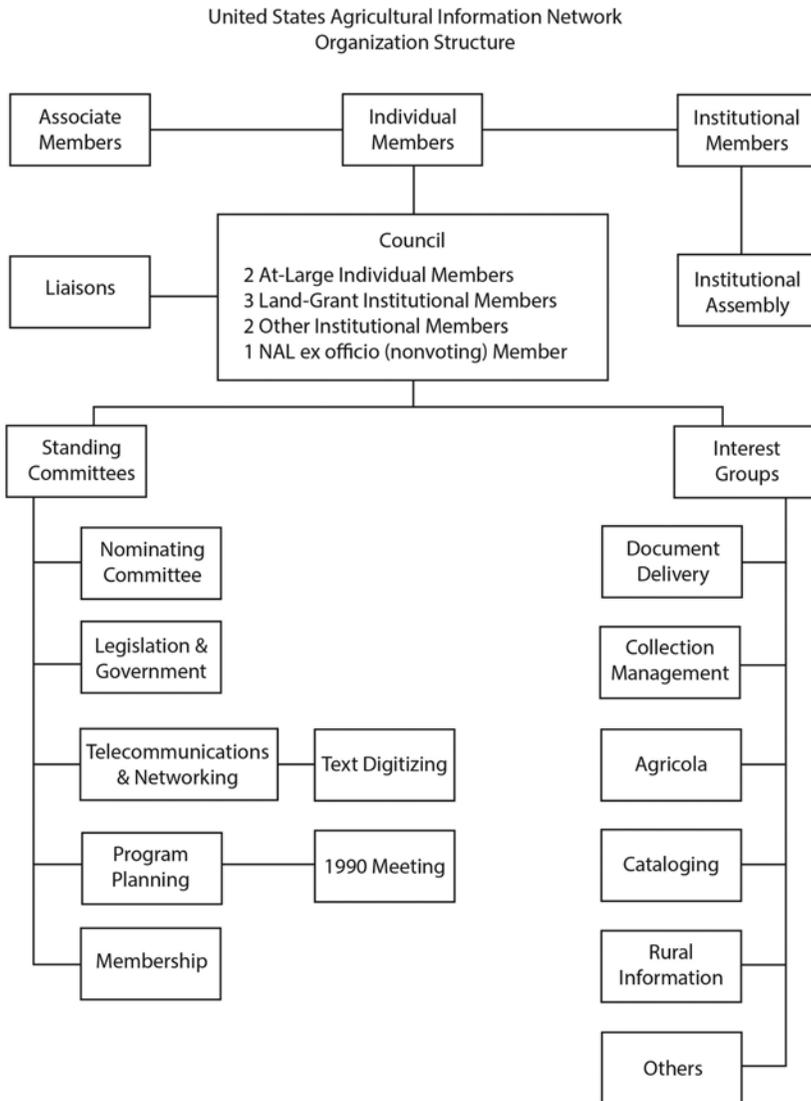


Figure 1. USAIN's organization structure, November 1989, which has served the organization well. Since then, the structure of USAIN has remained essentially the same, with the exception of the institutional assembly, which appears to have never been formed, and associate members, a category that appears never to have been defined. (Source: "USAIN Organization Structure," 1990.)

groups in conference programming has also been an important emphasis for USAIN, and this has served as another means for attending to both institutional and individual member areas of professional concern:

One of USAIN's major initiatives in the coming year is USAIN's first Program meeting, scheduled for November 6–8, 1990, at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The program will feature prominent figures in the agricultural information field speaking on topical issues such as global warming, biotechnology and technology transfer [*sic*]. In addition, there will be meetings of the USAIN interest groups on AGRICOLA, Cataloging, Collection Development, Document Delivery, Technology, and Rural Information. USAIN committees will also convene to review activity on NATDP and key government and legislative initiatives. Updates on the IAALD World Congress, the *World List of Agriculture Serials* and the *Universal Agricultural Thesaurus* are envisioned. Organizers also plan a demonstration of new agricultural information technologies and a review of CD-ROMs and other applications. (Boast & Thomas, 1990, p. 7)

The second USAIN conference was held at the University of Minnesota in October 1991. At that point it was decided that USAIN conferences would be held every other year and, with the exception of the 2006 conference, this practice has held true.¹⁵ Conference themes are determined by trending issues in the field and the interests of the membership as found in membership surveys. Programming is developed around the major theme, with interest groups providing various sessions (such as speakers and panel discussions) and the solicitation of contributed papers and panels. A complete list of conferences can be found on the USAIN website (<http://usain.org>) under the heading "Past Conferences."

One of USAIN strengths as a community of practice has been the flexibility of its interest groups. Interest groups have always been established by the membership to reflect their professional interests. These groups are formed by fifteen members petitioning the Executive Council, and are dissolved by the council if interest wanes. Some interest groups, such as Collections, have stood the test of time; others, such as Rural Information, merged with another interest group (Social Issues) to become the Rural Information/Social Issues interest group; and some have dissolved, such as AGRICOLA. This structure was put in place in the very beginning and has served the organization well. Members can self-select the interest group or groups they wish to be involved in without having to be appointed by the Executive Council. Interest groups are largely formed to reflect the areas of opportunity for collaboration to improve services, as well as to provide a mechanism to discuss prospects for advocacy. In one case an interest group was formed by members of a sister organization that wanted to relinquish their stand-alone status and become part of USAIN.¹⁶ Each interest group centers on a broadly defined theme, which can encompass a wide range of interests. The focus of the group can vary

from year to year depending on the interests and concerns of the group membership, thus keeping it current as trends emerge.

Committees also continue to play an important role in individual involvement and the operations of USAIN. Four of the five original standing committees (Nominating; Legislation and Government; Program Planning; and Membership) shown on the 1989 organizational chart are still a part of the organization today ("USAIN Organization Structure," 1990). Of the nine standing committees currently listed on the USAIN website, only one is not directly pertinent to the workings of the organization. This Preservation and Digital Library Committee began as the Special Projects Committee, which "shall be established to meet specific needs of the Network not met by a Standing Committee. They may be of short- or long-term duration, according to the parameters of the project" (USAIN, 2014, n.p.). In 2010 this Special Projects Committee was made a standing committee.

Both interest groups and committees engage the membership at all levels. This is reflected in comments by many of the USAIN Conference Scholarship Award winners who are still members of USAIN: "The opportunities to get involved in USAIN and connect with colleagues has helped sustain my interest in agricultural librarianship" (Williams, qtd. in USAIN, 2016b, n.p.); "[It] was a springboard for my interest in USAIN and I was asked to join a committee shortly after I got back home. Over the years I have served on the Executive Council and was elected as USAIN President" (Level, qtd. in USAIN, 2016b, n.p.). Beyond establishing linkages at the organization level, USAIN also connects peers or colleagues through its various communication outlets. USAIN issued its first membership directory in 1990, and has issued a directory or provided member access to the membership information on a continuing basis since that time. In 1997 the directory was renamed the *USAIN Networking Directory* to reflect its function in the organization (USAIN, 1997). Currently (2016), USAIN's Communications Committee is working to establish an online directory that will be made available on a redesigned USAIN.org website.

In 1993 the opportunity for members to communicate electronically was established with the launching of a listserv, USAIN-L. This was and continues to be an open venue that allows members, along with other professionals interested in agricultural information, to support one another's information needs. USAIN-L is viewed as a valuable service to all USAIN members, but especially to those new to the profession: "[I] . . . had great exposure to colleagues in other institutions, connected via the list serve [*sic*] and eventually landed a new job thanks to gleaning the information at the conference" (Awason, qtd. in USAIN, 2016b, n.p.); "Much of this happens at the biennial conferences, which provide ample time to exchange information and socialize with colleagues, but the USAIN listserv and

USAIN committee work are also good avenues” (Williams, qtd. in USAIN, 2106b, n.p.).

As a community of practice, USAIN also began recognizing outstanding practitioners and contributors to the field by establishing a number of service awards. In 2001 the organization inducted its first honorary members:

- *Nancy Eaton* (Dean of Libraries, Pennsylvania State University), for her work in the early development of USAIN and pioneering activities in the electronic dissemination of information, such as AgNIC and NATDP.
- *Jan Kennedy-Olsen* (former Director of Mann Library, Cornell University), for her visionary and pioneering activities in the field, including the development of the National Preservation Program for Agricultural Information.
- *Sam Demas* (College Librarian, Carelton College), for his leadership and direction, and also in the development of the National Preservation Program for Agricultural Information (USAIN, 2016a, n.p.).¹⁷

Also in 2001 USAIN instituted its Service to the Profession Award, designated for members who have demonstrated leadership in advancing the field of agricultural information, and who have established new directions or visions for the field. Pamela Q. J. André, a former NAL director, was honored for her outstanding efforts in areas like the development of AgNIC, digital preservation, and international outreach. In 2008 the first Special Achievement Award was given to Carla Casler of the University of Arizona’s Arid Lands Information Center in recognition of her outstanding support and service to USAIN. To date, USAIN has honored a total of thirteen individuals: ten Service to the Profession awards and three Special Achievements. A complete list of awards conferred can be found on the USAIN website (<http://usain.org>) under the heading “Awards and Honors.”

In 1998 USAIN established its USAIN.org domain and launched its website. The site includes information about the organization, its history and programming, as well as organizing documents and minutes. In 2013 an Executive Council–appointed task force working with a professional web-development group began the ambitious project of a complete reorganization of the website. Much of the information that is on the current website will remain, with a number of functional enhancements. The new site will have an online membership directory, a membership-renewal function, and the capability to access management information, such as the committee histories of individual members. One of the major goals of the new website is to increase networking opportunities among members by providing more detailed professional information. The website will also provide a secure platform for committee work, and also provide the Executive Council with management information concerning members and their involvement in the organization.

In its early years USAIN was a network of organizations with the primary concern of engaging with the broader issues in agricultural information. Even with its institutional focus, the leaders of USAIN recognized the need to include within the network those newly starting their careers. Thus in 1991 USAIN established the Conference Scholarship Award for professionals new to agricultural information (“USAIN conference scholarship,” 1991). This foresight was instrumental in the sustainability of the organization; as USAIN matured, it moved from a network of institutions and organizations to a community of individual practitioners. This important function has been cited by numerous scholarship winners as one of USAIN’s primary contributions to the profession.

BENEFITS OF CONFERENCE SCHOLARSHIPS AND TESTIMONIALS FROM SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

“Conference Scholarships for Members New to USAIN or Agricultural Information” were initiated in 1991, with two awarded for each biennial conference, currently in the amount of \$1,000 each.¹⁸ At the time of this writing, twenty-one scholarships have been given to librarians, or those in related positions, who were new to the profession. In 2005, conference scholarships for graduate students were also instituted, and six such awards have been conferred. Additionally, in 2005 a conference-attendance scholarship was granted to a Tribal college member.

To assess the impact of Conference Scholarship Awards on the professional development of these recipients, as well as their perceptions of USAIN as an organization, past winners were sent a short questionnaire with four main questions. The survey questions and selected responses are listed below. Out of the total of twenty-eight scholarship winners, twenty-one current email addresses were traced and these individuals contacted. Fifteen of the twenty-one were known to be current USAIN members. Eleven questionnaires were completed and returned, constituting a 71 percent return rate—all from current members of USAIN. Ten had been awarded “new to the profession” scholarships, and one was from a former graduate student, the only student recipient who remains active in the organization. (See appendix 2 for a list of the respondents’ names and their current institutions.)

A comparison of the respondents’ positions held at the time of the awards and their current positions reflects their advancement in the profession, as well as continued involvement. However, it may be surmised that many of those who did not respond to the questionnaire are no longer active in the field of agricultural information and may have been involved only for a brief span of their career. Additionally, the survey revealed and substantiated the viewpoint of USAIN as an effective network and community of practice. Specifically, scholarship winners overwhelmingly identified the importance of conference attendance as a means for

gaining experience in giving presentations and meeting with colleagues; they also attested to the opportunities provided for engagement in USAIN governance and initiatives. A clear majority also viewed networking and mentoring as key to the future of the organization. Further insights can be gained from the actual reflections of the respondents themselves, which are reprinted below.

Question 1: The Impact of Conference Scholarships on Professional Life

In responding to the question “What impact(s) did the award/scholarship have on your professional activities?” most respondents stated first and foremost that it allowed them to attend a major conference and, in the case of the 2005 joint conference with IAALD, their first opportunity to network with colleagues from other countries.¹⁹ Meeting other professionals in the field was viewed as a significant benefit, as was learning about a wide variety of diverse aspects of the profession. USAIN was regarded by two respondents as a “welcoming” organization, with opportunities “to meet and network with senior colleagues from around the world, and that has led to wonderful friendships that would last a lifetime.” Further, “this organization opened my eyes to a network of primarily solo (or specialized) librarians who worked together and often had each other’s backs for finding information and resources.” Gaining a supporting network of colleagues was mentioned frequently as an outcome of conference attendance: “From attending, I widened my professional network and still converse regularly with certain people I met at USAIN 2014”; “[It] tied me in with many colleagues with whom I continue to be connected going forward”; “and to network with other like-minded professionals.”

In addition, all of the respondents noted that they immediately became involved in USAIN, being asked to serve on committees, or volunteering to do so, with the result that many eventually chaired those committees. One respondent stated that involvement on committees made “the work more personal and meaningful.” Two others felt that the opportunity to review and give presentations and collaborate on projects was a significant benefit. Being a member of USAIN was regarded by three respondents as advantageous professionally in affording them “greater credibility” among their home-institution colleagues and helping them to identify and successfully access job opportunities.

Similar comments were gained from an earlier survey of Conference Scholarship Award winners conducted by Allison Level²⁰ (Level, 2014; see also appendix 2). She asked USAIN members to recall what made them interested in applying for the scholarship. Some winners already knew USAIN members, and these colleagues had encouraged them to apply; others were looking for opportunities that would help them advance in their positions. Whatever provided the initial impetus to learn more about USAIN, strong networking and mentoring among the members were iden-

tified as significant reasons why the organization played a key role in their careers. The following are excerpts from the recollections gathered by Level (2014) that speak directly to the importance of mentoring in professional organizations:

- Applying for the scholarship during the first year of my first professional job got the USAIN Conference on my radar early on, and with the help of my mentor at LSU, I was able to submit and present my first professional paper at the 1995 Conference. This was incredibly important to getting my career off to a solid start. . . . I trace [my] accomplishments and successes back to conversations I had with Toni Greider early on . . . and her encouragement to apply for a USAIN Conference Scholarship certainly helped get the ball rolling on what will soon be a twenty-year career as an agriculture librarian! (Debbie Currie, North Carolina State University)
- I was a new librarian and feeling very much a novice, as well. The scholarship made it possible for me to attend and meet so many wonderful professionals who have mentored me as an agriculture librarian and information professional more generally. I depend on USAIN for information about what is important in the field, for friendships and support. (Noël Kopriva, University of Missouri)
- Receiving the scholarship allowed me to attend the meeting and convinced me and my administration that this was a valuable connection—both because of the information gained and the people associated with USAIN. Being part of USAIN gives me a broader professional viewpoint than had I stayed within extension organizations. . . . The fact that I worked in a nontraditional librarian role seemed irrelevant to my colleagues, and I was encouraged to run for office and served on the Executive Council as a director and then president. While it may not be surprising that this organization is filled with people who are extremely knowledgeable and dedicated to the profession, what is unanticipated is the great willingness to provide assistance and share information. The people are what make USAIN a great organization. (Sheila Merrigan, University of Arizona)

Question 2: Engagement in USAIN

As noted previously, all of the 2016 survey respondents are current members of USAIN, and all mentioned some level of engagement within the organization, including attending most, if not all, of the biennial conferences. One had served as a conference chair. All have served on (some continuing to do so) organizational committees, often multiple committees, and have chaired or cochaired many of them. Four members have served as directors on the Executive Council, and three of these have also served as president. Several members have been the beneficiaries of projects supported by or managed through USAIN (for example, Project

Ceres and the preservation of agricultural literature project). Further confirmation of these insights is gained in the more expansive responses excerpted from the earlier survey (Level, 2014):

- Attending USAIN for the first time in 2010 connected me to others who do what I do, bringing me out of isolation. I felt very warmly welcomed and long story short, I now serve on the Executive Council. This role has definitely helped me further develop my leadership skills. I have also really enjoyed serving as chairperson of the Invited Speakers Committee for USAIN 2014. (Madeleine Charney, University of Massachusetts)
- I was a science librarian for several years then started a new job at Colorado State as the agriculture librarian, so I applied for the scholarship, since 2001 would have been my first USAIN conference. [It] was a springboard for my interest in USAIN and I asked to join a committee shortly after I got back home. Over the years I have served on the Executive Council and was elected as USAIN president. The goals, activities, and people involved in USAIN have made a significant difference to agriculture and research libraries. (Allison Level, Colorado State University)
- Being affiliated to such a vast network such as USAIN is an important resource for all your professional needs—just an email or a phone call away and the friendships and camaraderie formed over the years are really priceless! (Innocent Awason, Texas Tech University)
- I am not sure it changed my aspirations, but I find that it is a nice, small, niche organization that offers a variety of opportunities, including networking, and leadership opportunities that are harder to access in larger associations. . . . I thoroughly enjoyed the conference I attended and I am enjoying working on the Membership Committee, as I feel like we are making real, noticeable change for USAIN as a whole. (Shannon Farrell, University of Minnesota)

Question 3: Perception of the Primary Contribution of USAIN

Responses: Networking, communication, and professional development. By far, the majority of current respondents (seven of the eleven) expressed the viewpoint that USAIN plays a significant role in creating a sense of collegial community. Of particular importance has been participation in the biennial conferences, but also noted was the support provided through the USAIN listserv in responding to reference questions, as well as service on committees. These benefits are also tied to professional development and opportunities to learn about new advances in the field. The statements of the respondents reflect these views most convincingly, as follows:

- For me, the primary contribution of USAIN has been the opportunity to connect with other agricultural information professionals and keep

up on important issues in the profession. Much of this happens at the biennial conferences, which provide ample time to exchange information and socialize with colleagues, but the USAIN listserv and USAIN committee work are also good avenues. (Sarah Williams, University of Illinois)

- USAIN is vital to developing a support network for agricultural and life sciences/science librarians. When I began as a new agriculture librarian—with very little practical subject knowledge—USAIN gave me the information and support I needed to gain confidence in my field. (Kathleen Monks, University of Washington)
- USAIN provides a networking and an educational venue for agriculture science librarians/information professionals that does not exist in other organizations. The email list, website, and conference provide information flow for me to learn about issues that others are facing, as well as assist me when confronted with daunting challenges. (Suzi Teghtmeyer, Michigan State University)

Responses: Professional forum and policy advocacy. Additionally, several of the respondents noted USAIN's important role at the national level and as a forum for discussing and promoting the importance of a strong agricultural information system. Advocating for policies and funding that will support national programs, such as the preservation program and NAL, is seen as a key activity of the organization. Specifically, USAIN continues "to keep the role of librarians and information professionals alive, relevant and forward thinking as promoters and protectors of agricultural [information] by providing resources, research and other services to agriculture in local, national, governmental, academic and international spheres" (Charney). It also provides "a professional forum for ag-info [agricultural information] specialists . . . to discuss, present, and sometimes argue about issues surrounding ag information and related areas (for example, instruction, collections)" (Leslie Delserone, University of Nebraska).

Question 4: The Role of USAIN in the Future

In answer to the question "What do you see as the role of USAIN in the future?" there were two distinct points of view, neither of which was mutually exclusive. Five of the respondents described a future in which the organization continues to support the profession in much the same way it does now, although with even more professional development, communication, and mentoring, as well as support for collaborative initiatives. Specific comments were:

- In the future, USAIN will continue to serve an important role as an organization that brings together agricultural information professionals. This is valuable because it creates a community that can discuss, provide input on, and take action on issues such as the preservation of agricul-

tural information and agricultural research data, and can support new and established agricultural information professionals. (Williams)

- [USAIN's future:] 1) networking benefits remain vital to the membership; 2) continued monitoring/interactions/guidance on legislative issues and the National Agricultural Library; 3) broader and more formal mentoring arrangements; 4) although I believe that in-person networking is essential for members, as budgets become tighter for all institutions, USAIN may need to respond . . . by offering more electronic options for networking, interest groups, and conferences. (Merrigan)
- I hope that USAIN continues to play the vital role that it does, although I hope that it expands not only the opportunities for professional development, but support for doing so—the conference scholarship is a big part of the kind of support I wish we could expand. (Kopriva)
- I would like for us to take advantage of the internet by hosting more webinars, possibly hosting a “boot camp” or virtual conference in the off year. (Teghtmeyer)

Three other respondents expressed the hope that USAIN would play a stronger role in setting the national agricultural information agenda while at the same time expanding to include other potential partners both domestically (historically black land-grant universities and similar organizations representing such groups as farmers and related disciplines) and internationally, particularly North America (Canada and Mexico):

- I'd like to see us take more of [a] leading role in agricultural data management and preservation, as well as continue our active role in print and digital ag information preservation, and to be a more active partner with NAL. I would also like USAIN to more actively recruit and include those working in Canada and (at least) Mexico, and those serving at historically black land-grant universities. (Delserone)
- [P]artnering more with groups like SustainRT, Sustainable Agriculture Education Association, Organic Farming Associations (like NOFA, MOFGA, etc.), [and the] National Farmers Union. With the farming population aging, how can USAIN be more connected to and supportive of and advocating for farmers on the ground? (Charney)
- Continue with the primary contributions established, but maybe also grow to include librarians from North America or more globally. (Level)

Legacy of the Conference Scholarship Program

In terms of return on investment, providing funding for librarians and information specialists new to the profession clearly has a positive impact both on the individual awardee and the organization. The majority not only continues to advance in the profession, but also becomes and remains actively engaged in organizational activities and leadership, setting

dynamic new directions for the future. Although this survey sample was very small in the case of the student conference scholarship winners, the fact that only one of the five who received the award is currently a USAIN member and can be identified as having a position in the field implies that student support has limited long-term benefits for the organization. It seems likely, and certainly appropriate, that students go where the jobs are, and when that takes them into a different field of library or information management studies, then the organization loses that potential member. Nevertheless, there is likely something to be gained from an altruistic approach in providing students with a positive networking experience early on in their professional life. And there is always the possibility that at some point in the future a former student might return to the agriculture information community.

USAIN'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PROFESSOR

While USAIN has never been a large organization, it seems clear that it has made a significant impact on the field of agricultural information through funding of major projects and programs, through the work of its committees and interest groups, and through its support of professional librarians, as noted by the award recipients. As a network of institutions and organizations at the outset, USAIN focused on preservation and access to agricultural materials. "A National Preservation Program for Agricultural Literature" was written by consultant Nancy Gwinn in 1993 under the leadership of a USAIN Advisory Panel on Preservation. Following the adoption of the plan, USAIN established the National Preservation Special Project Committee to implement it (USAIN, 2013). The preservation program was ultimately funded in five phases between 1996 and 2006 by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). USAIN's preservation emphasis continues today with Project Ceres, a collaboration among USAIN, AgNIC, and the Center for Research Libraries, which began to digitize and archive three types of materials in 2013:

- The core historical literature of agriculture: The extensive body of serials and government publications on agriculture, rural life, and home economics published between 1820 and 1975 that have been digitized and/or microfilmed under the USAIN program
- Other agricultural and related trade and industrial journals published in the United States and Canada
- Serial publications published by the U.S. agricultural extension services and experimental stations

Eventually, the program will expand to support the preservation of and electronic access to a broader array of international agricultural resources (Center for Research Libraries, n.d.). In 2010 the long-term importance of these projects to the membership was reflected in changing the Na-

tional Preservation Special Project Committee to a standing committee called Preservation and Digital Projects.

Over the years USAIN as an organization focused not only on preservation but also on access to information in both the print and digital environments. USAIN was an early supporter of AgNIC, and many of USAIN's members contributed to the project. In 1999 the AgNIC interest group was formed to provide a forum for the membership involved in this national initiative, and as a means for involving more agricultural librarians in a national initiative. At the same time, USAIN was also promoting international cooperation, and in 1997 it supported the Sixth Eastern European Round Table held in conjunction with the USAIN/IAALD Conference in Tucson, Arizona.

Consistently, USAIN has offered support to NAL through its leaders, committees, and interest groups. As early as 1989, USAIN presidents testified before Congress to advocate for NAL's budget and successfully restored funding. USAIN members also served as advisors to NATDP and provided information on legislative matters that affect NAL, as well as input on filling NAL's leadership positions. The AGRICOLA interest group was active in conducting surveys and working to improve the capabilities of its database. The committees and interest groups have provided USAIN members with an official conduit for influencing agricultural information matters. Having such opportunities is important to the community of practice, as reflected in the distribution of its membership. As of 2014, only six of the fifty-one land grants were not represented.

These are just a few examples of how USAIN as an organization has contributed to the profession. More detailed discussion of its initiatives can be found in other papers in this issue. The organization's achievements are also chronicled in "History and Achievements" on the USAIN website.

USAIN AS AN ORGANIZATION THAT HAS STOOD THE TEST OF TIME

For most of USAIN's existence, membership in many other professional organizations has been on the decline, yet its own individual membership has increased from its low of seventy-nine members in 1993 and has remained steady over the last decade.²¹ This begs the question as to why a small, modestly funded organization like USAIN has survived and grown while many larger, well-established ones have seen a decline in members? A quick review of the literature yielded published research that provides some insight into this question. A 1997 survey found that the main reason librarians did not join organizations was the cost of dues. On the other hand, the reasons for joining a professional organization were an opportunity to network and contribute to the profession and the quality of conferences (Kamm, 1997). It was also found that the value one gains from a professional organization is based on the time and effort put into

it through committee work, professional development, and conferences (Fisher, 1997), and “for an association truly to represent the profession it must encourage participation by newcomers and by librarians at all levels from all types of libraries” (Kamm, 1997, p. 302). The research also shows that it is the members who determine whether the association adds value (Fisher, 1997).

In the case of USAIN, the organization developed because of a long-standing need for agricultural libraries and information centers to work together to provide better services to the agricultural community as a whole. These needs were articulated in a number of reports over a twenty-five-year period, and finally, in 1988, under the leadership of NAL’s director, Joseph Howard, the network became a reality. Unlike other resource-sharing networks, such as OCLC, USAIN provided a place for the individual professional as well. It was this blend that allowed USAIN to reinvent itself when the need arose.

USAIN’s transition from a network of *organizations* to a network of *professionals* would not have happened if individual members had not understood the value of the organization. This value that its early officers recognized, including the authors, was that together, we could achieve much more than we could ever hope to achieve on our own. A strong USAIN offered possibilities to improve and strengthen agricultural information services and expand and support a key group of information professionals. This value was also substantiated by the comments from the USAIN scholarship winners. The founders of USAIN had the foresight to offer incentives to beginning librarians to attend its conferences through its scholarship program. The comments from past recipients clearly support the earlier survey conducted by Kamm by citing networking, the ability to contribute through committee and group work, and the quality of the conferences as examples of how the scholarship has impacted their careers. Another value that USAIN has added is the mentoring that results from attending conferences; the professionals new to agricultural information were able to establish personal networks of individuals who could mentor them in various stages of their careers. This has mostly resulted from encouraging professionals new to the field to attend conferences and become involved in the work of the organization, and they in turn became mentors to others. The organization has also kept membership costs down in both annual dues and conference attendance, the latter by using university venues with low registration fees.²²

In today’s technological environment, professional organizations are struggling to survive. Up to the present, membership in these organizations has largely been drawn from the baby-boomer generation (1946–1964), which is now beginning to retire in large numbers. Baby boomers had tended to join organizations out of a desire to serve, to make a difference in the field, and to build relationships. Now, however, information

that previously was accessed through association contacts can be found online at no cost (Fabian, 2013). According to Sarah Sladek, by 2015 Generation Y (1982–1995) will likely comprise the majority of the workforce in the coming decades, but it is predicted that they will not have the financial resources equal to previous generations.²³ Generation Y will have more migratory professional careers and thus will be more discerning of the value of joining professional organizations. This cohort, however, still desires to be connected and searches for opportunities to engage both online and in person. When Generation Y seeks to connect beyond the internet, it is predicted that they will embrace associations that can help them develop relationships, connect them with mentors, and teach new skills (Sladek, 2014).

If these observations hold true, USAIN appears to be in a good position to survive and even thrive as the mantle is passed to future generations of agricultural information professionals. Its success will depend on the organization maintaining a clear purpose that reflects current themes and interests, and that provides cost-effective value to its membership (Kamm, 1997, p. 302). “If the associations are going to continue to provide realistic opportunities to learn and to participate actively, they must be responsive to their members. In particular they must be as flexible as possible and open to the concept of change” (D. G. Frank, 1997, p. 318).

USAIN’s future remains, as it always has, in the hands of its membership. We believe that this factual record of USAIN’s history, combined with the testimonies of an active subset of its members, provides important insights into its success. USAIN has stayed true to its original intent to maintain a forum for the discussion of agricultural information issues, and to that end the organization has worked to be inclusive, relevant, and responsive to its members. Thus it has positioned itself well to remain a healthy and vibrant professional organization for agricultural information professionals. By continuing to be nimble and flexible, we have every expectation that USAIN will survive in succeeding generations.

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Sheila Merrigan, University of Arizona; Kathleen Monks, University of Washington; Suzi Teghtmeyer, Michigan State University; and Sarah Williams, University of Illinois.

APPENDIX 1: THE EVOLUTION OF USAIN

- 1962: Secretary of Agriculture establishes an ad hoc advisory committee to recommend broad network plans.
- 1969: *Agricultural Sciences Information Network Development Plan* published by EDUCOM. The plan was developed with the specific goal to “identify principle network elements and design a workable network structure” (Beck, King, & Olsen, p. v).
- 1971: National Agricultural Libraries Network established linking the libraries of USDA with the agricultural libraries in land-grant and non-land-grant universities and colleges.
- 1975: The Conference for the Implementation of the Agricultural Science Information Network does not result in creating a viable network.
- 1977: National Research, Extension, and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (aka the Farm Act of 1977) expressed the intent that NAL should develop a library and information network coordinating the agricultural libraries of colleges and universities and Department of Agriculture libraries, in close coordination with private industry and other research libraries. But the law did not provide any funding, hence the network was never established.
- 1982: Interagency Panel on NAL. *Assessment of the National Agricultural Library: Final Report to the Secretary* issued, which recommended the development of an agricultural information network.
- 1987: *National Agricultural Library Information Network: Outline of a Plan* issued by NAL.
- 1988: Nominating Committee appointed and the first slate of officers elected; USAIN named (Thomas, 1988).
- 1989: Bylaws codified; National Agricultural Text Digitizing Project (NATDP) begins.
- 1990: First council elected; first USAIN conference held.
- 1993: USAIN awarded a \$7,000 grant from the Council on Library Resources (CLR) for the Agricultural Literature Preservation Initiative; National Preservation Program for Agricultural Literature launched.
- 1993: USAIN-L launched; Social Issues Interest Group formed.
- 1995: USAIN helps sponsor a planning workshop for the Agricultural Network Information Center (now collaborative), (AgNIC); first conference scholarship recipient named (USAIN, 1995b).
- 1996: Agricultural Literature Preservation Initiative funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.
- 1997: USAIN reorganizes from a network of institutions to a network of individuals; first action plan issued, bylaws approved, and first election

under new structure held.

USAIN milestones from 1997 forward can be found at <http://usain.org/history.html>.

APPENDIX 2: SURVEY RESPONDENTS, 2016²⁴

Innocent Awasom, Texas Tech University (2005)
 Amy Bedard, William H. Miner Agricultural Institute (2008)
 Madeleine Charney, University of Massachusetts (2010)
 Leslie Delserone, University of Nebraska (2005, student)
 Shannon L. Farrell, University of Minnesota (2012)
 Noël Kopriva, University of Missouri (2008)
 Allison Level, Colorado State University (2001)
 Sheila Merrigan, University of Arizona (1999)
 Kathleen Monks, University of Washington (2014)
 Suzi Teghtmeyer, Michigan State University (2001)
 Sarah Williams, University of Illinois (2003)

2014 Survey Respondents Quoted in This Paper

Innocent Awasom, Texas Tech University (2005)
 Madeleine Charney, University of Massachusetts (2010)
 Debra L. Currie, North Carolina State University (1995)
 Shannon L. Farrell, University of Minnesota (2012)
 Noël Kopriva, University of Missouri (2008)
 Allison Level, Colorado State University (2001)
 Sheila Merrigan, University of Arizona (1999)
 Suzanne L. Reinman, Oklahoma State University (2012)
 Sarah Williams, University of Illinois (2003)

NOTES

1. USAIN began an extensive revision of its website in 2013, and as of this writing it is near completion. The domain, USAIN.org, will remain the same, but the addresses for the subpages will change. The URLs referenced in this paper are to the current USAIN website (July 2016).
2. USAIN calculates its anniversary date from the first organizational meeting in December 1988, when the organization was given the working name, U.S. Agricultural Information Network, and its officers were chosen by land-grant directors. The organization itself was not fully formed until 1989, when it was officially named and bylaws were drafted (Boast & Thomas, 1990; USAIN, 1988).
3. The Interuniversity Communications Council, better known by its trade name EDUCOM, was founded in 1964 for the purpose of using digital computers to increase sharing among institutions of higher education. EDUCOM's research development report, no. 169, was titled *Agricultural Sciences Information Network Development Plan* (Beck, King, & Olsen, 1969).
4. Founded in 1967 as the Ohio College Library Center, the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) and its member libraries cooperatively produce and maintain WorldCat, the largest online public-access catalog (OPAC) in the world (OCLC, 2016).
5. According to the National Library of Medicine website, the Friends of the National Library of Medicine was organized in 1986 to promote, publicize, and support the library. It is a coalition of individuals, medical associations and societies, hospitals, health science libraries, corporations, and foundations dedicated to increasing the public awareness

- and use of NLM, as well as to support its programs in research, education, and public service (Friends of the National Library of Medicine, 2016).
6. Agricultural librarians were involved in the Science and Technology section of ALA or the Food and Nutrition division of SLA.
 7. USAIN's dues were ultimately set at \$15 for individuals and \$250 for institutions. There was also an associate category of \$500, but there is no record of USAIN having such members. Dues have been increased only once in its history for individuals, to \$35; this was during the restructuring of the organization ("USAIN Membership Notice," 1990).
 8. This seed money included \$7,000 from the CLR grant, \$5,000 from Cargill, and \$5,000 from USAIN. This provided the funding to write and submit the proposal to NEH for the preservation project and led to being awarded \$850,000 for its first phase (Barnes, 1996).
 9. NPR was created in 1993 under the Clinton administration to make government more efficient. The restructuring of the USDA was a result of this initiative (NPR, 2015).
 10. The membership data from 1992 to 1996 show an 89 percent decline in institutional members and 47 percent decline in individual members.
 11. This structure was proposed by a small group selected by the Executive Council to articulate a new organizational structure and draft bylaws and rules of procedure for the organization (Swab, 1988).
 12. The Agriculture Network Information Collaborative (AgNIC) is a voluntary alliance of members based on the concept of "centers of excellence." The member institutions are dedicated to enhancing collective information and services among the members and their partners for all those seeking agricultural information over the internet (AgNIC, 2016).
 13. This section is largely taken from an unpublished history by the authors written for the USAIN's twentieth anniversary celebration in 2008.
 14. The authors are defining a *community of practice* as an organization that focuses on the engagement of the profession through projects, networking, communication, and professional-development opportunities.
 15. At the 2005 conference the membership voted to hold the conference in the years that the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) did not meet; USAIN's conferences were then scheduled for "even" years.
 16. The most recent interest group, Agricultural Economics Research, Information, and Education (AERIE), created in 2013, came about as a result of a previously separate organization petitioning the USAIN Executive Council and the membership to become an interest group and end their stand-alone status (C. Britton, personal communication, June 30, 2016).
 17. Honorary members are individuals who are not members of USAIN, but who have been either an outstanding individual in the field of agricultural information or have provided outstanding service and support to the organization ("USAIN Bylaws," 2014).
 18. The first reference to the conference scholarship was found as an announcement in 1990 in *Agricultural Libraries Information Notes*, 17(8), 23. The awarding of scholarships is noted in the minutes of the Executive Council, and according to USAIN's website, the first scholarships were awarded in 1995 (USAIN, 1995b, 2014).
 19. The International Association of Agricultural Librarians and Documentalists (IAALD) was founded in Ghent, Belgium, in 1955. In 1990 its name changed to the International Association of Agricultural Information Specialists.
 20. The authors extend their thanks to Allison Level for allowing the inclusion of extensive parts of her article on USAIN conference scholarship winners, and also to the many scholarship winners who are quoted herein.
 21. Data from the membership directories from 2003 through 2013 show a range of individual members between a low of 137 and high of 151. Institutional members vary, from twenty-six to thirty-one institutions.
 22. The first USAIN conference was held at the University of Illinois. The cost of registration was \$100 for USAIN members. The conference for 2016 was at the University of Florida, and registration fees were \$325 for members, which includes eight meals over the course of the four-day conference.
 23. Sarah Sladek is the chief executive of XYZ University, a generation-focused management

- consulting company. She is the author of four books on generational issues, including *Knowing Y: Engage the Next Generation Now* (2014).
24. All respondents approved the inclusion of their comments.

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Antoinette Paris Greider was an early member of USAIN and participated in many of the events described in this paper. She has served in various capacities for the organization, including as president from 1995 through 1998 and guiding the transformation of USAIN into what it is today. She has been active in agricultural information for the past forty-five years and maintained a leadership role in the International Association of Agricultural Information Specialists (IAALD) for thirty years. She began her career as agricultural librarian at the University of Kentucky (UK), a position she held for thirty-two years, then served as the associate dean of research and education at UK. Currently in “phased retirement,” she now directs programming for international initiatives at the UK Library in Lexington.

Barbara S. Hutchinson is a twenty-year member of USAIN. She has served on numerous committees, as well as on the Executive Council as a director and then president (1999–2001). At the University of Arizona, she was director of the Arid Lands Information Center for more than two decades, and was managing director of the International Arid Lands Consortium for ten years, among other positions. Currently retired, she continues part-time in the School of Natural Resources and the Environment, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, acting as a coordinator for the Global Rangelands initiative (<http://globalrangelands.org>). This effort involves nineteen land-grant universities, as well as international partners, in a collaboration called the Rangelands Partnership. She has a B.A. in history, an M.S. in library science, and a Ph.D. in higher education administration.