

SWSS Report to WSSA - February 2025

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The 78th annual meeting of the Southern Weed Science Society took place at the Charleston Marriott in Charleston, SC January 20-23. Pre-registration attendance totaled 274. There were 223 total presentation entries (110 posters and 113 oral papers). There were 82 graduate student competition presentations - 28 posters (15 M.S. and 13 Ph.D.) and 54 oral papers (29 M.S. and 25 Ph.D.). David S. Shields, “Carolina Distinguished Professor” from the University of South Carolina Department of English Language and Literature was the keynote speaker. Dr. Shields has worked to identify historical crops once grown in the south and revitalize their growth and culinary use. Graduate student events included a 15-Minute Oral Paper Competition and a Poster Competition, a pre-conference Top Golf Graduate Student Mixer, luncheon that included a business and panel discussion “From job applications to acing interviews”, a Women’s Networking Event, and the Quiz Bowl. During the year, the graduate student organization hosted two webinars:

Title: Scientific Writing for SWSS Graduate Students on November 1

Key Topics Covered: Tips on writing a thesis or dissertation, common writing and formatting mistakes, and importance of publishing in WSSA journals

Speaker: Dr. Jason Norsworthy

Title: USDA - NIFA Grant Writing Webinar on October 7

Key Topics Covered: NIFA funding opportunities for weed scientists, tips for writing successful proposals, and how the proposal review process works.

Speakers: Dr. Vijay Nandula, Dr. Michael Flessner, and Dr. James Kells

Several members were recognized at the Awards Banquet. John Richburg, Corteva AgriScience, Fellow; Nick Basinger, University of Georgia, Outstanding Educator; Vijay Singh, Virginia Tech, Outstanding Young Weed Scientist-Academia; Megan Singletary, Texas Tech University, Outstanding M.S. Graduate Student; and Mason Castner, University of Arkansas, Outstanding Ph.D. Graduate Student.

Eight students from four academic institutions applied for the SWSS Enrichment Experience in 2024. The following three students were selected and paired with their chosen sponsor: Pamela Carvalho-Moore, University of Arkansas, was hosted by Matthew Wiggins, FMC Corporation; Ryan Hamburg, Texas A&M University, was hosted by Jason Adams, Syngenta (Vero Beach, FL); and Gustavo Silva, Texas A&M University, was hosted by Peter Dittmar, University of Florida. All these students gave an overview of their experience during the SWSS General Session in Charleston.

The Weed Contest was held in Blacksburg, VA on August 7 and hosted by Virginia Tech. Local arrangements were handled by Shawn Askew, Michael Flessner, Jacob Barney, and Whitney Askew. Ten universities across SWSS competed in the competition. There was a total of 79 participants in 2024, 68 graduate students and 11 undergraduate students. First Place Team – Graduate - University of Arkansas Team 1 (Jared Smith, Maria Souza, Michael Doddle, Cory Ketchum), Undergraduate - University of Tennessee (Maddie Douglas, David Cartwright, Katie Witbeck, Courtney Higham); First Place Individual – Graduate - Tristen Avent, University of Arkansas, Undergraduate - Aidan Ross, University of Arkansas; First Place Weed ID – Graduate - Gustavo Camargo-Silva (Texas A&M University) and Undergraduate – Rhet Baxley, University of Arkansas, First Place Unknown Herbicide Identification – Graduate - Maria Souza, and Undergraduate – Aidan Ross, First Place Farmer Problem – Graduate - Josh Lee (University of Georgia) and Undergraduate – Aliyah Abdur-Razzaquq (Texas A&M University), First Place Individual Calibration – Graduate - Tristen Avent, and Undergraduate – Aidan Ross, First Place Team Sprayer Calibration – Graduate - Mississippi State Team 2 (Dalton Whitt, Kayla Broster, Ncomiwe Maphalala, Ailaina Richardson), and Undergraduate – University of Tennessee (Maddie Douglas, David Cartwright, Katie Witbeck, Courtney Higham). The 2025 Southern Weed Contest will be in Newport, AR and hosted by Bob Scott, University of Arkansas. The proposed date is August 8.

Lastly, there were several problems pertaining to the new Confex system that need to be addressed. The following information was created by the former SWSS Program Chair, Eric Palmer, who is now serving as SWSS President:

- Links for uploading abstracts and final presentations did not work for everyone.
- Downloading and formatting titles and authors along with numbering the talks had to be done manually.
- There was no way to create an author index using talk or poster numbers.
- Abstracts were not viewable in the online program until after the SWSS meeting had started.
- No ability to tell if final abstract was submitted in Confex except by clicking on every one individually when trying to download them for contest packets.
- Not able to download all final presentations in a session at one time. I had to download each presentation individually and it was very time consuming.

The program needs a lot of improvement for the printed program side of things as that all had to be formatted by hand when pulling from Confex. It would have been easier just using an excel spreadsheet and saved a lot of money. WSSA is still dealing with a lot of the same issues. The biggest concern is that little or no improvement was made from NCWSS to SWSS to WSSA to address pain points.

List of improvements for Confex should we continue with this program:

- More consistent platform for logging in and submitting titles, abstracts, and presentations. Too many issues for what should be a simple process to log in and submit.
- Make sure submission links are there for all to view. Some presenters are not able to see the link for submission.
- Remove "are you a student" box and replace with "Are you competing in student contest?" Yes or No. If "yes", then only show MS Contest or PhD Contest options in drop down menu.
- If in the student contest, also have a box to add major professor email address and copy both the student and the major professor confirming each step title submission, abstract submission, and presentation submission.
- Ability to submit poster presentations as a pdf.
- Export from Confex to printed program format must improve for titles in sessions. This is manual now.
- Method to generate author index for printed program as this was done manually using excel.
- Bulk export for printing off abstracts for contest and proceedings.
- Way to tell date of last update or if final abstract submitted.
- Bulk download of ppt files at least by session for session chairs.
- Ability to export program to meeting app from Confex for future meetings. Abstracts were not attached to talks prior to meeting. Online program little or no use by members during 2025 meeting.

Future SWSS annual meeting locations, hotels, dates:

2026 – Sheraton Music City, Nashville, TN January 26-29

2027 – Corpus Christi, TX

Respectfully submitted,

Peter A. Dotray
SWSS Representative