

## The New Vitality of AIBS

LAURENCE D. MOORE, Professor and Head, Department of Plant Pathology, Physiology and Weed Science  
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg



These are exciting times for the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS). In the past 6 years it has been restructured with the revitalization of *BioScience*, the development of strong programs for education and public responsibility, the purchase of a national headquarters building, and the establishment of an American Foundation of Biological Sciences. Phytopathologists who have not followed these changes should know more about them.

AIBS was established by the National Academy of Sciences in 1947 as an

operating division to further the advancement of the biological sciences and to foster and encourage research and education in the biological, medical, environmental, and agricultural sciences. In 1955 it became an independent nonprofit institute. Currently, 43 affiliated scientific societies and research laboratories and 7,000 individual biologists and biomedical scientists are members of AIBS. A new constitution and bylaws were approved in 1983, which resulted in the establishment of a 12-member board of directors and an AIBS council. Each of the affiliated scientific societies has a representative on the council. From its membership, the council elects four members to the board of directors so that the board is representative of the affiliated societies as well as the individual members. The board is responsible for establishing the policy of AIBS as well as fulfilling the scientific and corporate obligations of the institute. Moreover, the council and board of AIBS recently approved the establishment of the American Foundation of Biological Sciences, the functions of which are very similar to those of the APS foundation.

AIBS has long been recognized as an organization that manages an annual conference within which the meetings of a number of the affiliated societies are coordinated. In recent years, as many as 3,600 biologists from 15–20 affiliated societies have gathered at the annual AIBS meeting. In 1988 the theme of the meeting was "Biological Diversity," and this year the theme is "Global Change." Members of APS will find many of the symposia, papers, posters, and discussion sessions to be of interest. For example, at this year's meeting there are symposia on "Air Pollution and Forest Health," "Modeling of Acid Rain," "Long-term Ecological Monitoring for Global Change," and "Molecular Biology of Fungal Development." The annual meetings are always preceded or followed by 20–30 field trips covering a multitude of topics.

While AIBS may be best recognized for its role in conducting annual meetings, the institute is involved in many other activities that are of major benefit to biologists. Foremost among the initiatives of the "new" AIBS are those for communication, education, public responsibility, and special science programs. Within the last few years, *BioScience* has become a preeminent publication, offering interpretative articles of the highest quality across all disciplines of biology, as well as timely and useful features. Each year a number of journal issues address specific themes, such as "Tree Death: Cause and Consequence," "Conservation Biology," "Hawaii's Unique Biology," "Landforms and Ecosystems," and "How Animals

Shape Their Ecosystems." This fall, *BioScience* will publish a special theme issue on "Yellowstone National Park and the Fire." Besides having feature articles, *BioScience* fosters communication among biologists by means of a number of special sections: Viewpoint, Roundtable, Education, Biologist's Toolbox, and Books. The Viewpoint page and Roundtable essays may cover any topic of interest to biologists, from science policy to technical controversy. The Education section includes observations and opinions on the teaching of biology. Biologist's Toolbox contains commentaries and descriptions and reviews of instruments and computerware. *BioScience* publishes special book review issues each year. In recognition of its outstanding quality, *BioScience* has recently received a number of awards, including the Olive Branch Award and the Gold Circle Award from the American Society of Association Executives.

The Public Responsibilities Committee of AIBS has several important functions. It produces *Forum*, a bimonthly publication that focuses on the activities of Congress and various governmental agencies. It tracks legislative initiatives and monitors congressional hearings and briefings that affect the life sciences. Members of this committee also prepare *Washington Watch*, a monthly feature in *BioScience*. Numerous congressional publications and a computer-based system for tracking legislation are used by the program. AIBS is often called upon to identify biologists who provide expert testimony to Congress. Most recently, expert testimony has been provided concerning appropriations for NSF, USDA, and NOAA and legislation to foster the maintenance of genetic diversity in plants and animals. AIBS has also been a strong supporter of efforts to increase funding for research in federal agencies and universities.

Over the past 6 years AIBS has sponsored and helped fund a Congressional Fellow program. The program is designed to bring well-qualified working biologists into direct contact with our nation's decision-making processes. The program fosters understanding among biologists of how public policy is formulated and how it can be made responsive to the essential insights of the biological disciplines. Each fellow spends a year as a special legislative assistant on the staff of a congressional committee or works directly with an appropriate member of Congress. The American Society of Plant Physiologists fully funds a fellow each year, and a number of other societies have joined together to fund a person jointly with AIBS. APS provided partial support one year but recently has not participated in the program.

As yet another part of its service to the biological community, AIBS initiated in 1954 a program of advisory services to various federal agencies, and in 1964 created the Special Science Programs (SSP) Department to consolidate grant- and contract-supported activity within one group. Included in SSP activities are the organization and management of: panels of experts for peer review; panels to evaluate technical and scientific aspects of agency programs; and scientific, technical, and policy workshops, seminars, and symposia. AIBS also maintains a consultant service, through which it identifies professionals who are willing to serve as consultants to biology departments.

I am proud to be associated with the new vitality of AIBS. During the past 6 years, I have served as the appointed representative of APS to the AIBS council and have been elected to two terms on the AIBS board of directors. APS is benefiting from its affiliation with AIBS, and, more important, individual plant pathologists can benefit by becoming members of AIBS. AIBS is no longer just a meeting organizer but a voice for all of us in biology.