



# 2024 Councilor-at-Large Candidate



Samantha Thomas | Bayer Crop Science

## Leadership Experience

I have been active in APS for more than 20 years now, beginning when I was in grad school. I have been a member of various committees, including holding leadership roles in the Turfgrass Pathology and Seed Pathology Committees. I have served previously as a member of the Nominations Committee. In recent years, I have been active as part of our Bayer (previously Monsanto) initiatives with students that have included participating in industry sessions, panels, and conversations. I have been a speaker at the annual Plant Health meeting for the past few years at various sessions or symposia, and these requests are associated with bringing an industry view to a given topic.

I am a leader within the seed industry in the area of seed health, seed pathology, and phytosanitary trade matters. I have established and led numerous cross-industry working groups to address U.S.-based agriculture challenges within the American Seed Trade Association (ASTA). I also have held leadership positions within ASTA on various committees and subcommittees. Given my knowledge of the seed industry and best practices, I supported ASTA as a member of an industry consultation group that worked with the USDA to draft the Regulatory Framework for Seed Health (ReFreSH) documents, previously I worked with ASTA and the USDA on establishing an on-shore testing program for cucurbit seeds in an effort to safeguard the United States from Cucumber green mottle mosaic virus introduction and establishment in the Northern California seed production area. For cucurbits, I am active on the Emerging Viruses of Cucurbit Working Group (EVCWG) coordinated by **Rebecca Melanson** and **Bill Wintermantel**, which was an outcome of a Phytoviews Session at APS. I remain active on the EVCWG.

Through APS I have met numerous individuals and been an invited speaker at a variety of external meetings. The highlight of these requests are university guest speakers, as I enjoy the opportunity to engage with students about the pros and cons of an industry career.

## Statement of Vision for APS

“Do it with passion or not at all” is one of my favorite quotes. I have spent close to 20 years helping growers and farmers all over the world be more successful by providing guidance

based on plant pathology principles. This is my passion: enabling others through knowledge sharing. While more recently I have moved into a policy space, I have been able to keep plant pathology and seed pathology as a focus area, and I still engage in outreach and education of others, including students, farmers, and policymakers. Fundamentally, plant pathologists are working to improve agriculture and sustain natural resources, which sustain and benefit humankind. For me, the value of APS is that this is where the science speaks. It does not matter what type of organization you represent (academic, government, or industry); APS is the forum where all can come together in collaboration, generate data, and use the outcomes to solve disease problems across the United States and the globe. These outcomes can then drive the routine practices used in industry or the policies implemented by governments. In my opinion this is the true power of APS that needs to be maintained and increased: enabling the science. Some of the struggles of being in industry is the appearance of a lack of collaboration or cooperation; I have worked to address this in my career and will continue to do so. Often times, bandwidth is the issue rather than disinterest. I feel opportunities exist for there to be better collaboration with some of the other associations that industry supports (e.g., the American Seed Trade Association). This in turn will elevate the awareness of APS as a partner in science-based solutions. I see increasing the collaborative forum across other organizations as an opportunity. Another area of opportunity as we look to the future is the emergence of new leaders. I feel APS has increased the developmental opportunities for students and early-career professionals, but I would ask if there were more that we can do in this space? One should continue to develop through their career and is there an area where APS could foster more mentoring, seminars, or conversations? I feel APS has done well to engage and include scientists from other countries; however, the overall representation globally remains small. Is there a way to increase participation through partnered funding with other associations? Many of my ideas look outside the U.S. view or landscape to increase the impact and awareness of APS. Agriculture and a healthy food supply are global undertakings. In a world where agriculture land availability is decreasing while the population is growing, production of every crop will matter. It is only through sound scientific data on new or evolving pests, updated epidemiology with changing climates, and an informed society that we will be able to deliver on the challenge of successful agriculture production and natural resource protection. I see APS as a place of collaboration and communication as key in these future endeavors.