



Green Lands  
Blue Waters

## Voices From Our Network

### The Civic Scientists

The next generation of continuous living cover (CLC) researchers reflect on the current moment in history and reimagine the future.

**Oluwakorede Olugbenle**

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In the five years I have been in the Midwest studying, I can count on my fingers alone the number of Black plant scientists that I have had the privilege of meeting. When I started at first I did not give it that much thought and believed representation was just low at those specific times, but as time passed and things stayed the same it became evidently clear. Due to the systems that have been in place for years in our field, few Black people have been given opportunities and the result of that is as clear as looking at a tilled field versus a perennial field.

A good number of graduate students I have talked to at some point question themselves as to why they are studying whatever it is they are studying or whether they want to or can even continue on in their field. Personally, I have asked myself those questions numerous times, maybe even a bit more than average. Since there are practically no other scientists

in my vicinity who look like me that are at the same stage as I am or further along in their career, my mind at times goes to the extreme and I think that it is just not possible for someone like me to accomplish anything in this field. But I know that is ludicrous. There are other people like me but just spread out in different regions who are going

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through the same thing. Reminding myself of that gives me that bit of extra fortitude and helps me push forward. I enjoy the work that I do, and although it may be laborious at times it is one of the things I still see myself doing in the future and would even relish it more when all the self-doubt is gone.

Thinking about the responsibilities I have as a scientist, the things that come to mind are making breakthroughs in continuous living cover (CLC) research, advancing the knowledge we currently have, setting an example for the next generation and supporting the other scientists who need it. There is a limit to what I can do as a person. I am just a kid from

want to pursue a career in the plant science field and maybe even a career in CLC research. What I continue to hope for is that as I carry on with my career that I would be able to meet more people with similar experiences and that our field would have a plethora of diversity not just in ideas and research but also in backgrounds, gender, and race.

*"There is a limit to what I can do as a person. I am just a kid from Nigeria who likes plants. Ultimately, I just want to be the best scientist that I can be and hope that it will inspire younger people in the minorities who want to pursue a career in the plant science field and maybe even a career in CLC research."*

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Difficult as it may be, the work that needs to be done to increase diversity is necessary. It will not only benefit those of us currently in the system but also the people that will be coming after us. The next generation of scientists should not go through the same problems we are currently experiencing. The bulk of effort we put in to make our cropping systems sustainable... we should also use that much to make our communities sustainable.



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*Graduating from Iowa State University with an Agronomy B.S., Korede is focusing his graduate work on the perennial dual-use crop Intermediate wheatgrass. His research focuses on finding the optimal planting date of Intermediate wheatgrass intercropped with Red clover in Wisconsin. He is passionate about issues in the food system, adventure books, Arsenal FC, ice skating, and assisting the next generation.*