

**An Eleventh Commandment:  
With Special Reference to Michigan State University**

In 1909, Michigan State University (MSU) created a Department of Soil Science. Thirty years later, during the month of my birth; Walter Clay Lowdermilk proposed the following *Eleventh Commandment*. He did this after researching the major historical sites of both western and eastern civilizations:

*Thou shalt inherit the holy earth as a faithful steward conserving its resources and productivity from generation to generation. Thou shalt safeguard thy fields from soil erosion, thy living waters from drying up, thy forests from desolation, and protect thy hills from overgrazing by the herds, that thy descendants may have abundance forever. If any shall fail in this stewardship of the land, thy fruitful fields shall become sterile stony ground or wasting gullies, and thy descendants shall decrease and live in poverty or perish from off the face of the earth.*

In response to the MSU budget crisis of 1969, the Department of Soil Science was merged with another academic unit. Shortly thereafter, sites used for long-term soil science research were abandoned because of the perception that activity of this type was no-longer needed in an age of abundant and inexpensive synthetic and mined fertilizers. The June 11, 2004, issue of *Science*, however, was dedicated to Soil, indicating that soil represents the *Final Frontier* on our planet for comprehensive and scholarly scientific endeavors. It took decades after the MSU academic unit merger for the institutional wounds associated with the merger to heal. During the past decade the number of soil science faculty at MSU has declined significantly. In response to the MSU budget crisis of 2009, our institution is in the process of merging its Department of Forestry with three other academic units.

The February 12, 2010 issue of *Science* was dedicated to Food Security. In his editorial, David Baulcombe stressed the significance of the major shortage of professionals who can successfully translate the latest life science knowledge into practical realities. In a world of about seven billion people, with more than one billion living in poverty, the only way to decrease risk of global conflict is through sound disciplinary education of individuals with the ability to have highly positive local impacts. In addition, it must always be remembered that the *First law of Interdisciplinarity* is based solely on the well-being of the disciplines. Healthy disciplines of Soil Science and Sustainable Forestry are imperative for global prosperity.

Without major cutting edge Departments of Soil Science and Sustainable Forestry, is Michigan State University contributing to the prophecy of Lowdermilk's Eleventh Commandment?