



New books

Fieldwork Ready

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main image

Fieldwork's not so bad once you have your boots on," Sara Vero says. Vero's new book, *Fieldwork Ready*, digs deep into the logistics, best practices, and realities of working in the field. This approachable guide is broadly applicable for undergraduates and early career researchers across environmental sciences.

Vero is an assistant lecturer in agricultural science at Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland. Inspired by her own experiences in the field as a soil hydrologist, Vero began writing *Fieldwork Ready* in 2018. Here, *CSA News* interviewed Vero to ask about her inspiration and the content of the book. The following has been edited for length and clarity.

CSA News: How would you sum up *Fieldwork Ready*?

Vero: *Fieldwork Ready* is here to help students and early career researchers overcome the initial limitations that might stop them from getting into the field or might prevent them from being truly effective and successful during fieldwork. It really takes students and researchers from the very basics, when you're thinking about your sites and tests through the planning and logistics elements. Just from my own experiences and from watching others in the field, I think planning and logistics seem to be the cause of more failed or less-successful fieldwork than errors on the scientific side.

CSA News: Can you think of an example of that?

Vero: It actually happens quite often! For example, there was one student who was in such a rush to get in the field and get some data that he took a lot of soil samples from a site that wasn't reflective of the type of soils he was purporting to examine. With a little bit more planning at the site selection stage, he would have been totally successful. Then there are issues of overplanning—there are people who commit to doing too much in the field or taking samples at too many sites. There's no point in bringing in samples and finding out the lab can't process them or there's nowhere to store them. Those are all logistical issues. It's a shame to lose out on data you've collected because of something like that.

CSA News: Why did you decide to write this guide?

Vero: When I started my Ph.D., there was quite a big learning curve when it came to fieldwork. You're thrown into the deep end, and oftentimes, undergraduate fieldwork doesn't prepare you enough. I kept thinking to myself, what if there was a resource that taught basic planning and logistical skills, from start to finish of a planned fieldwork campaign? I thought that was something I'd really like to do; but it really came down to my little sister—about two years ago, she said, "Why don't you just start writing?"

People need this book, these resources now. I just needed someone to tell me, “Why don’t you do it?”

CSA News: Why is now the time to publish the book?

Vero: It’s very timely now because agricultural and environmental sciences are attracting more students every day. All of these people need to be trained and equipped in order to do this research effectively. And particularly, right now, as more and more people are facing distance-learning, we need to emphasize logistics as we work on teams in the field and with teams remotely. With the COVID situation, a lot of researchers face restricted access to laboratories, and it’s been difficult for some researchers to keep their programs going. It’s only through excellent field skills and orchestrating field and laboratory teams efficiently that those programs keep running. Now, more than ever, these skills have shown themselves as essential.

CSA News: What makes you the right person to put together a book like this?

Vero: I always liked the idea of writing a book, particularly communicating what I know and what I can research. It’s full of scientific information, but it’s written in a way that anyone could pick it up and understand it. What I want the reader to feel is like I’m here, with you, in the field, and we’re going to find solutions.

CSA News: Who do you see benefitting from reading *Fieldwork Ready*?

Vero: The first half presents planning and logistical skills that are useful for absolutely anyone, from crops, hydrology, soil science—really any science or geography, for that matter, with a large field component. The second part of the book goes into specific skills for soil, water, crop, and wildlife researchers. It should be useful to really anyone doing outdoor research.

CSA News: Is there anything else you want readers to know?

Vero: Fieldwork is exciting; it's rewarding. There's really not a day in the field that's wasted. You're always learning something, you're always building skills, it's full of really unexpected delights. Yes, it's challenging: you're going to get your feet wet, you're gonna be tired, sometimes you might be hungry, but you really know your friends when you're hauling buckets of cattle slurry or you're marching up a river to a long-term field site. It's a wonderful experience, and it's been one of my best experiences as an environmental scientist. Everyone's got a good field story, if you ask them.

Fieldwork Ready will soon be available for purchase. Visit [wiley.com](https://www.wiley.com) and type in "Fieldwork Ready" in the search box to place an order. Use discount code "FWR35" to receive a special introductory discount of 35% until 31 Mar. 2021.

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