

Encounters

Seed & agbiotech professionals with atypical backgrounds

A very special Seed Central event
 March 8, 2018

The panelists & the students with whom they were paired



Lisa Branco
 Sales Manager
 Radicle Seed Company & Headstart Nursery

Born and raised in the Salinas Valley, I have been surrounded by agriculture my entire life. I took an interest in the world of farming at a very early age. Undecided on which direction to go, I completed two years at my local junior college (Hartnell) where I took my first class in agriculture and was hooked. I transferred to Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo where I earned my bachelor's degree in Agribusiness with a concentration in marketing and international management. My first internship was at Seed Dynamics and that is where my love of the seed industry began. I worked during summer breaks and holidays and used every resource available to me to learn and connect deeper within the industry.

Upon graduation I moved back to Salinas and began my career with Radicle Seed Company & Headstart Nursery, sister companies headquartered in Gilroy, CA. The position was entry level and I truly started at the ground level and worked my way up, learning every step of the way. I have been in the field working with the transplanting crews, I have done product development through field trials, logistics coordination, project management and much more.

Fast forward to fifteen years later, I am the Sales Manager for both companies and still enjoy going to work each and every day.

When you find something you are truly passionate about, it doesn't feel like work! I support the California Seed Association where I serve on the Board of Directors as well as Chair the Industry Communications & Youth Activities committee. I recently joined as a member of the Communications Committee for the American Seed Trade Association and am a graduate of the Seed Ambassador Leadership Team. The opportunities that have been afforded to me throughout my journey have been plentiful. I strive to pay it forward by being a voice and advocate for the seed industry; guiding the next generation towards a rewarding career like I have been fortunate enough to find.



Cintia Sagawa

I am 4th-year Ph.D. Candidate in Plant Biology with a designated emphasis in Biotechnology.

Cintia is a young Brazilian Scientist passionate about using biotech solutions and entrepreneurship in agriculture. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Plant Biology with a designated emphasis in Biotechnology at the University of California, Davis. Her work at Dr. Abhaya Dandekar's lab focus on understanding the biology of plant diseases caused by fastidious bacteria, using molecular biology and biochemistry tools, for the development of new therapeutic strategies for fruit and nut trees. She holds a Master's in Genetics and a B.S. in Biological Sciences from Sao Paulo State University - Brazil. Cintia is also interested in empowering women in Sciences and promoting research in developing countries.



Aimée Burger
 Associate Plant Manager
 HM.Clause

The day I walked into a farm house for an interview in the west of Johannesburg, South Africa, marks the start of my career in Agriculture. My degree was in Marketing Management with a specialization in Logistics & Supply Chain Management at the University of Johannesburg.

This “general” function allowed me to work in various industries from Pharmaceutical, Confectionary, Petrochemical and Media, supporting in planning and moving product through the world. As Logistics and Customer service manager at Hazera South Africa, I discovered the fascinating world of Vegetable seed! After 5 years in the small subsidiary, I started a role as Manufacturing Manager in HMClause Modesto, moved my family to California and entered the manufacturing world. It’s a whole new ball game and fascinating to see the technology and procedures to take raw seed from the field and turn it into a high quality saleable product. Recently promoted to Associate Plant Manager in Modesto, I now enjoy and even bigger picture of our interfaces with all other departments to ensure seed supply to our customers all around the world.



Mark Taylor

I am currently a Ph.D. student in the Plant Biology Graduate Group studying the effects of genetic variation in phenological traits on fitness. In particular, I am studying the evolution of plasticity and canalization, which is the ability of plants to maintain trait values despite environmental or genetic perturbations. With this background, I hope to use my research to enhance food sustainability as the world faces the potentially disastrous challenge of rapid climate change. Whether this is in academia, government, or industry positions, I hope to continue to research the genetic basis of complex traits and how to make those traits robust.



Marc Clark
 Station Manager, North America
 Enza Zaden

I am currently responsible for research in North America. I have been with Enza Zaden, a Dutch based vegetable seed breeding company for almost three years. We operate research stations in California, Florida and Mexico. I graduated with a bachelor’s degree in Liberal Arts from San Jose State University in the 1980s. I became involved in the vegetable seed industry after many years in Greenhouse agriculture and floriculture production



Kay Watt

I am a fifth year PhD candidate in the Plant Sciences department, and a member of the Integrated Genetics and Genomics graduate group. My first degree was a BA in Religious Studies, after which I served in the Peace Corps. I returned to academia to undertake a second bachelor’s degree in Biotechnology at the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at University of Massachusetts, Amherst. After graduation, I intend to go into the seed industry while pursuing my MBA.



Scott Harris
Global Supply Chain Analyst
HM.Clause

BA in Religion from Transylvania University in Lexington, KY. Originally from central Kentucky, Scott's initial career interest was in vocational ministry. After he received his BA in Religion from Transylvania University, he pursued a number of ministry avenues across the US. This pursuit brought him to California in 2008 and during that time, he fell in love with cooking. Scott transitioned from his pursuits in ministry to professional kitchens and restaurant management where his interests increased in the broader food and agriculture space. These budding interests brought him to UC Davis, where he completed an MBA in 2015 and found a compelling opportunity with HM.Clause. In his 2 years with HMC, he has been a Manufacturing Manager in their Modesto processing facility and recently transitioning into a Global Supply Chain Analyst role where he leads global supply chain initiatives and provides high level analysis for potential opportunities across the chain.



Jordan Chaffin

I am currently a first-year MBA candidate in the GSM.
I aspire to a leadership role with one of the world's largest food and agriculture companies after I graduate.



Monica Ivey
Corporate Relations Lead
Monsanto Company
Hawaii and Woodland, CA

Born in Germany, Monica traveled around the world with her family before finally settling in Hawaii in 1991. Not soon after making the islands home, Monica discovered her love of beauty pageants, earning the title of Miss Hawaii Teen USA in 1996. At 19, she made her first foray into media as a DJ for Radio Disney. The skills she acquired on the pageant stage and on the air paved her way to BA in Broadcast Journalism from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. Shortly after graduation, Monica became a familiar face on island television as the morning traffic reporter at KHNL. Afterward, she made the transition into public relations, working for The Queen's Medical Center before launching her own firm. For three years, she represented the likes of designer Andy South from Project Runway, Hawaii International Film Festival and BAMP Project, where she worked with top acts like Justin Bieber, Journey and John Legend just to name a few. Monica then made her segue way into the luxury market as Director of Marketing and Strategic Partnerships at *Modern Luxury Hawai'i*. She planned events for prestigious brands like Harry Winston, Salvatore Ferragamo and Tiffany & Co. Monica began her career at Monsanto Hawaii in 2014 and is responsible for leading the communications efforts for the company's farms across Oahu, Molokai and Maui and most recently started working on communications efforts for Monsanto's vegetable business in Woodland, CA. With an ever increasing interest in the food we eat and where it comes from, it has become increasingly important for Monsanto to communicate who we are and what we do. Monica has been able to break down barriers within Monsanto, pushing the company to operate in a way it never has before, resulting in many successful and meaningful programs from the company.



Paul Kasemsap

I'm starting my third year as a PhD student (Horticulture and Agronomy) in the Department of Plant Sciences, UC Davis. My research with Prof. Arnold Bloom focuses on physiological mechanisms and genetics underlying wheat nitrogen assimilation, subsequent grain protein content in response to rising CO2 levels. I aspire to a career in Education (with perhaps something related to Agriculture), as I believe investing in human resource development is the most sustainable development one could ever do. Yet, I see the need in getting myself exposed to as many career options as possible, to see fully what I am capable of, and which path would best allow me to attain my full potential. In the next 5-10 years, I see myself working with international organizations whose focuses are on Agriculture/rural development and Education.



Adrian Jaggi

Portfolio Planning Lead
 Syngenta Seeds

Master's Degree in Political Science, Economics and Business (Lic. Rer. Pol.)
 University of Basel, Switzerland

Born and raised in Switzerland and the UK, I attended the University of Basel in Switzerland and graduated with the Swiss equivalent of a Master's Degree in Political Science, Economics and Business.

After University, I was recruited for the graduates training program of the Swiss bank UBS, gaining a well-founded oversight of the various stages of the banking business, ranging from commercial banking to investment advising and to import/export financing.

After 5 years within the commercial banking unit, I changed industries and was hired by Sandoz - a predecessor of Syngenta - as an Assistant Controller for the Global Seeds Division. Two years later, within my finance position, my family and I relocated to the USA, to Boise Idaho, where I became responsible for the financial reporting of our North American operations. Another two years later, I moved away from Finance to become the Associate Business Unit Manager for Fresh Vegetables Seeds in the Western US, for which I also managed the forecasting and pricing functions. Currently I work within the global Project Portfolio and Planning team, for which I am leading the effort for North American and LATAM Biological Operations.

Global Agriculture is a dynamic, fast-paced business, in which I am looking forward to the next challenges.



Laudan Yavari

I am a first year full-time MBA student at the UC Davis, Graduate School of Management. I am in the process of obtaining my general management MBA but am focusing in the food and agriculture industry. I have a BA in Marketing from the University of San Diego and have spent the last four years working in Marketing in a produce company, Driscoll's. I hope to continue my work in Marketing management in the organic or sustainable agriculture industry post-graduation.



Carl Jones

Accelerated Breeding Technologies Lead
 Monsanto Company

Education: B.S. Professional Photography Rochester Institute of Technology, and Salzburg College, Salzburg Austria

M.S. Horticulture Oregon State University, Plant Breeding and Genetics Option, Minor: Food Science

Ph.D. Genetics, University of California, Davis

I studied advertising photography in my undergraduate degree. After a few years working in that field I took some time off to travel and looked for something that I felt would have more impact in the world. I went to work on and then ran an Organic farm that specialized in fresh market and seed crops. A desire to improve on the varieties available led me to a post-bac and then a MS at Oregon State. From there I came to UC Davis, attracted by the Tomato Genetics Resource center and the great history there. This led to an opportunity to work with Seminis Vegetable seeds (later Monsanto) in pepper genetics. Today I lead a global group of scientists developing vegetables that delight our customers with innovative, integrated solutions which enable them to sustainably supply the world with delicious fruits and vegetables!



Pricilla Glenn

I am a first year PhD student studying horticulture and agronomy at UC Davis with Dr. Jorge Dubcovsky.

My current project involves finding a candidate gene for spikelets per spike within wheat in order to increase yield. My long term goal is to enter the plant breeding industry working on crop improvement.



Chow-Ming Lee

Consumer Sensory Lead
 Monsanto Company

After obtaining his Bachelor and Masters from the University of Tennessee, Chow-Ming accumulated seven years of industry experience in ice cream manufacturing. Chow-Ming also holds a minor in Business Administration. In 2004, he received his Ph.D. in Food Science & Technology with emphasis in Sensory Evaluation.

Chow-Ming started his Sensory career as a post-doctoral research associate at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, IL. Most of his research at the University of Illinois focused on the sensory and concept acceptance of soy products. Prior to joining Monsanto, Chow-Ming spent four years as the Senior Sensory Scientist at PepsiCo, focusing on orange juice sensory and consumer testing. At Monsanto, Chow-Ming is responsible for basic and applied research of fruit and vegetable. His primary focus is to bridge instrumental measurements, sensory properties and consumer liking. His work helps to shape fruit and vegetable breeding and product introductions. If successful, his effort will contribute to improved flavor in the produce industry. With better flavor, he also hope to reduce food waste due to poor quality.



Felipe Pinilla

I am a first year graduate student from two programs, Agricultural and Resource Economics and the MBA. I am convinced of the added value that UC Davis provides with this joint program to continue my career in the agricultural sector. My experience at the Ministry of Agriculture of Colombia made me understand that there is a clear need to have instances where different stakeholders of the different value chains should work together to achieve better individual and group results, particularly in developing countries. My experience and the current academic formation will be the basis for me to work on promoting agribusinesses and integrated value chains with a concentration in developing countries.



Brian Love

Corn Silage Breeder
 Land O'Lakes - Forage Genetics International

BA in Anthropology, McGill 2000
 MSc & PhD in Plant Sciences, University of Alberta 2007

I was born and raised in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Although I would visit the family farm agriculture was not a career path I had in mind. Part way through my undergraduate studies in Anthropology I took time off to teach English in Oaxaca, Mexico. The farmers in the community made a big impression on me in terms of the diverse crops and varieties they grew. After finishing my degree, I pursued graduate studies in the plant sciences where my focus was studying crop and variety diversity. In the process, it became clear to me that farmers were not interested in diversity for diversity's sake and were constantly seeking improvements. This led me to seek a career in plant breeding. I have been fortunate to work on several crops and geographies both as a front-line breeder as well as in support roles such as a Program Officer for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and in Vegetable Breeding Operations for Monsanto. Today I work for a global dairy cooperative (Land O' Lakes) and have the great pleasure to work with a team that is focused on developing corn silage varieties that meet the needs and preferences of our dairy family co-op owners.



Nicole Soltis

I am a PhD candidate in the plant biology graduate group at UC Davis, in the lab of Dr. Daniel Kliebenstein. She is researching the genetics of a common plant disease, *Botrytis cinerea*, to ask how it has evolved to infect so many different plant species. She is also interested in the role that plant breeding and domestication has played in changing this plant-pathogen interaction. Nicole is also involved in teaching and science communication at Davis, and aspires to work in communicating science to stakeholders, whether in government, public education, or at the university level.



Mary Beth Miranda

Senior Manager, Technology Sourcing and External R&D
 Novozymes

Mary Beth Miranda has more than two decades of experience in business development, new ventures and external innovation. As the Senior Manager—Technology Sourcing and External R&D, she leads the North America external R&D effort for Novozymes’ BioAg business which includes The BioAg Alliance, the strategic alliance between Novozymes and Monsanto that develops and commercializes microbial technologies to improve crop yields. Novozymes is an investor in AgBiome where Dr. Miranda serves as a board observer. Dr. Miranda earned her Ph. D. in chemical engineering at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and BS degrees in chemical engineering and applied biology at MIT.



Shiyu Chen

I received my PhD degree in Plant Breeding and Plant Genetics in University of Wisconsin-Madison. Now I’m working as a postdoc on genome assembly and genetic variant mining in a vegetable breeding group. I aspire to enable an adaptive, sustainable and profitable farming system through the knowledge of data science and plant breeding.



Eben Ogundiwin

Site Leader, Bayer Vegetable Seeds West Sacramento
 Head of Marker Assisted Breeding, Americas
 Technology Integrator, Americas

University of Ibadan, Nigeria (B.Sc. Agricultural Science, 1991; M.Sc. Agronomy, 1994; Ph.D. Plant Breeding & Molecular Genetics, 2000)

Eben Ogundiwin was born, raised and educated in Nigeria, obtaining his B.Sc. Agriculture (1991), M.Sc. Agronomy (1994) and Ph.D. Plant Breeding & Molecular Genetics (2000) degrees from University of Ibadan, Nigeria. He conducted his graduate research at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, Ibadan, Nigeria between 1995 and 2000, and immigrated to the United States in 2001 as Postgraduate Research Scholar at California State University, Fresno (2001 – 2005) where he also taught in the Biology and Agricultural Science Departments as adjunct Professor. His second postdoctoral experience was at the Plant Sciences Department, University of California Davis (2005 – 2007) after which he was promoted Associate Specialist in Molecular Genetics (2008 – 2009). He loves teaching and research equally and therefore wanted to remain in academia. However his hunger for translation of research findings to commercial products led him to consider private industry, the switch he now wishes he had made earlier in his career! He joined Bayer Vegetable Seeds in 2009 as Senior Scientist and currently leads a diverse and talented team of Crop Geneticists working with breeders in North, Central and South America dedicated to accelerate development and release of superior vegetable varieties. In both academia and the industry, Eben has contributed to genetics knowledge in a range of fruit and vegetable crops such as tomato, melon, watermelon, carrot, onion, pepper, plantain, bananas, cowpea, peach and almonds. He remains passionate on connecting the lab to the field to ensure that the ever growing world population can be adequately fed. After all, of what value is an excellently written article documenting results of a brilliant intellectual research that is locked up in a drawer and never translated to life-impacting product or service? Knowledge is power. Yes, but wisdom (i.e. applied knowledge) is power-FUL!



Marwa Zafarullah

Marwa Zafarullah is a graduate student in Integrative Genetics and Genomics at the University of California Davis. She recently completed her Master in the lab of Dr. Luca Comai, investigated the evolutionary relationship between centromere proteins CENH3 and CENP-C in the context of centromere-mediated genome elimination in *Arabidopsis thaliana*. After successful completion, she made a transition to Ph.D. program and now working in the lab of Dr. Flora Tassone. When she is not in the lab, she is exploring the area, trying to make new friends, find new favorite recipes and musicians to add to her never-ending lists.



Jonathan (Jonny) Pham
 Scientist, Biotechnology and Agriculture
 Novozymes NA

Education: UC Berkeley (BS, Bioengineering); UC Davis (PhD, Microbiology and Molecular Genetics; Designated Emphasis in Biotechnology)
 Originally from Southern California, I received a BS in Bioengineering from the University of California, Berkeley. After working in a microbiology laboratory as an undergraduate research apprentice, I discovered my love for biology (and a mild disinterest in engineering). Thus, I pursued and completed a PhD in Microbiology and Molecular Genetics, studying mammalian pathogenesis and disease at UC Davis. Since joining Novozymes, I have been researching soil probiotics, leveraging the fundamentals of evolutionary and systems biology to boost global crop yield. Since Novozymes makes a concerted effort to improve global environmental sustainability, I hope to leverage the same fundamental findings and techniques employed in the Ag field to help Novozymes improve the health of coral reefs across the globe. I recognize that I am at the beginning of a journey that will span decades to complete, but I am happy to embark on the journey all the same.



Michelle Tang, Ph.D. Student, Plant Biology

My interest in plants peaked when I volunteered at the Butterfly House, a division of the Missouri Botanical Garden. I noticed the diverse shapes, sizes and colors in plants and learned that diversity must allow plants to thrive in all sorts of environments. While this volunteer opportunity allowed me to observe plant growth, it was basic scientific research offered the opportunity to explore basic principles and mechanisms in plant biology. As an undergraduate, I participated in several REU programs at the University of Missouri studying the evolutionary history of the cabbage family and the Danforth Plant Science Center working to increase oil content in transgenic Camelina seeds. Currently I am fifth PhD student studying plant metabolism and systems biology with Drs. Daniel Kliebenstein and Siobhan Brady. I hope to continue research in plant biology in both industry and academic settings.



Jyoti Rout
 Plant Transformation & Cell Biology Lead
 Intrexon Company

M.S. Botany. Utkal University, India, Plant Cytogenetics Option / Ph.D. Nation Rice Research Institute, India / Post Doc: Bill Lucas's lab, UC Davis (1990-92)and Gene Nester's Lab UW, Seattle (1992-95). Industry experience: Monsanto (1995-2010); Dow Agro Sciences (2010-2015); Intrexon Corp (2016 - present)

I was born in a small rice farm, in the state of Odisha, India. During my childhood, India was undertaking many infrastructure developments. My father worked as a civil engineer responsible for building irrigation projects in remote parts of Odisha. His occupation came with relocating my family quite frequently. Moving regularly became difficult as my education progressed. As a result, my mother and father placed me in boarding school at a young age of twelve. I was surrounded by students who were not only much smarter than me, but were at least two years older as well. My best escapes days were during the school breaks, where I spent time with my grandfather; working in his farm and learning to grow all sorts of plants as he had almost acres of kitchen garden. My fascinations towards plants one day will save me from failing. My journey with plants has lead me on a career to work for three top-tier Biotech companies (Monsanto, Dow and Intrexon). From my career, I have learned that it is important to determine what your aspirations are as early as possible. Additionally, it is crucial to use your imaginations and to seek the help and experience from other individuals.



Karen Zhu

I am a third year undergraduate, majoring in Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. I was originally an environmental science major because I want to help create more sustainable communities that minimize our impact on the natural world through conservation. However as I pursued my degree, I discovered that I like the discovery aspect of science more. Now, I want to use what I know about science to utilize our resources better and develop tools that are more effective for conservation. After college, I plan to pursue a career in either industrial, medical, or agricultural biotechnology. I am currently leaning more towards industrial and agricultural biotechnology, and I hope to discover more about the two fields before applying for my first job.



Rebeca Schauland
 Research Associate in Discovery Genetics
 Monsanto Company

UC Davis (BS, Human Development with emphasis in Early Childhood)

Despite growing up in a farming town in the Central Valley of California, agriculture was never a consideration when I thought about what I wanted to do with my life. I attended UC Davis as part of the Human Development program with the intention of pursuing a career in science education. When I took a part-time job at the Tomato Genetics Resource Center to help pay my bills in college, I did not expect to discover a passion for plant genetics; this led me to change course after receiving my BS in Human Development. An exciting opportunity was extended to me to join a team in the Monsanto Vegetable Seeds Division that was working to enable marker-assisted selection in key vegetable crops. With the guidance of a few invaluable mentors at Monsanto, I have learned on the job and advanced in my role to lead projects supported by global teams. I am still early in my career but am excited to be working in the ag biotech field where I am contributing to the development of crops that can be grown more sustainably.



Chenjiao Deng

I am a first year graduate student of horticulture and agronomy. During my undergraduate study, I mainly focused on urban horticulture, especially the identification and management of ornamental plants. And now my major is plant systematics, which is a subject of building phylogenetic trees and trying to figure out the evolutionary history of different plants, and Dr. Daniel Potter is my major professor. Although I'm in the program of master, my ultimate goal is to achieve PhD degree and attain a job in one of the universities or research institutions to continue my study and research in plant sciences, especially in the areas of plant systematics or plant breeding.



Douglas Sherman
 Scientific Programmer
 Forage Genetics International

UC Davis (BS, Computer Science & BS, Mathematics); UC Davis (M.S. Computer Science, emphasis in Machine Learning).

Originally from Massachusetts, I built a career in restaurant management that eventually took me to California. In Fremont, my guests were primarily in tech, and this inspired me to finally pursue school. So, I pursued a double major in Computer Science and Mathematics from University of California, Davis, and continued on for a M.S. in Computer Science. It is there that I developed a passion for Machine Learning, a field that allowed me to use my Computer Science and Mathematics skills in tandem. Moreover, I became excited by its potential in Genetics and Genomics research. This passion led me to Forage Genetics International where I began developing tools to improve their lab management and data analytics pipelines. There I discovered the impact that Machine Learning could have on the plant breeding industry by providing tools to model the complexities of phenotypic and genotypic functions without needing assumptions about distributions, data formats, or experimental design. I plan to continue pursuing the specific impacts I can make with Machine Learning



Josue Vega

Josue Vega transferred into UC Davis in 2016 from my community college, Diablo Valley College and just finished my undergrad in December of 2017 under the genetics and genomics major. My post-graduation aspirations are to continue doing research and continue in a genomics masters program. In this time I hope to stay in the research field and get more exposure on the current limits in technology and in the field. My personal aspirations are to also to invest more time in participating in the Latin community outreach programs aimed toward young adults in any STEM fields especially Biology. This is a very close subject for me and now that I have the means, I would like to give back.



Elly Soeryapranata

Senior Scientist, Food Technology / Trait Development
 Bayer

Airlangga University, Indonesia (BS, Chemistry); Washington State University (MS and PhD, Food Science)

After completing my undergraduate, I worked in a cigarette company in Indonesia as a Science Information Specialist. My responsibility was to develop online information system to capture technical information relating to the cigarette chemistry. It was here that I first learnt about Food Science. This major was not popular in Indonesia at that time. My passion for good food and chemistry led me to apply for a graduate degree in Food Science at Washington State. My graduate project was to understand bitter peptide development in aged Cheddar cheese. The research exposed me to several disciplines that I had never heard of, including sensory science, dairy biochemistry and processing, enzymology of peptidases, microbiology and molecular biology of lactic acid bacteria, and quantitative analysis for peptide using soft-ionization mass spectrometry. While in graduate school, I also found a new passion: developing new food products. My ideal job at that time was to work in the private companies that developed either lactic acid bacteria or enzymes to be used as ingredients in the dairy industries. After completing my PhD, I accepted a job offer with Nunhems USA, even though I had no experience in plant biochemistry or post-harvest technology. The position was not my dream job, but it caught my attention because I was curious about seed business and the possibility to be involved in the development of novel produce. My responsibility at the beginning was to build analytical chemistry capacity for produce analysis. Twelve years later, as the demand for consumer-driven produce has increased, so have my responsibilities evolved. In my current role, I provide technical or scientific input for Marketing & Sales, as well as work with the molecular and breeding teams in developing new lines for consumer-related traits. I am also responsible for developing strategy for applying food technology research in breeding for consumer-related traits. What I do now truly reflects what I am passionate about: food, chemistry, and product development. This job has provided me an opportunity to create novel produce that provides consumers with consistent good eating experience.



Yaxin Wang

I completed my undergraduate study in China at Nankai University majoring in Biotechnology in 2012. After that, I joined the Horticulture Department at Cornell University for a Master's degree and completed it in 2014. Currently, I'm a fourth year PhD student at UC Davis in Plant Biology Graduate Group with a Designated Emphasis in Biotechnology. I work with Dr. John Yoder and my PhD projects focus on characterizing host and non-host recognition in parasitic plants. My biggest aspiration for post-graduation career is finding an agriculture and biotechnology related job in industry. I always appreciate the applicable aspect of

biotechnology and being a plant biologist, I consider agriculture the most meaningful area to put the biotechnology into practice.



Kelly Stanton

Onion Breeding Coordinator
 Enza Zaden

Graduated in 2000 from UC Berkeley with a BA in Integrative Biology (focus on ecology).
 M.S. from Purdue in 2009 from Dept. of Horticulture and Landscape Architecture.

While studying Biology at UC Berkeley I spent my summers doing ecology internships. That led to a technician position at Fordham University studying hibernation in ground squirrels. When the funding ran out I moved to another position at the University of Notre Dame where I assisted with various population ecology studies and worked as support staff at a field station. After a few years I was feeling that my career was at something of a dead end. While I still wanted to work in biology, I didn't want to be a professor. So I went to Purdue to get a Masters in Horticulture hoping it would open doors for me in the private sector. Shortly after graduating I got a job with the vegetable seed company Enza Zaden. As the Onion Breeding Coordinator I help with planting, harvesting, and evaluating trials as well as selecting and planting bulbs in order to produce seed.



Kimberly Gibson

Kimberly Gibson is a PhD student in Horticulture and Agronomy at UC Davis where she studies crop domestication and Lima bean breeding with Professor Paul Gepts. Her research is focused on the biochemical defense mechanisms that plants use to protect themselves from insect pests and how these mechanisms can be promoted through breeding to create cultivars that require fewer pesticide applications and are suitable for organic agriculture. Prior to starting her doctoral studies, Kimberly worked for The Center for Environmental Education of the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico and consulted on non-profit management with Robert Glavin, Inc in San Francisco. She earned a bachelor of arts with honors in Urban Studies at Stanford University in 2013. Following the completion of her doctoral studies, Kimberly hopes to pursue a career in plant breeding either at a public institution or private company.

Bonus

How does a gymnast from Ecuador end up as a scientist at Monsanto?

What inspired me to become a scientist, and why I think more of us should speak up



By Santiago Navarro
Platform Lead for Weed Control, Cell Sciences and Imaging, Monsanto Company

How does a gymnast from Ecuador end up as a scientist at Monsanto? While there's no blueprint for this pathway, the key was science.

Right now, I'm in a unique position where I lead two innovative teams. One is focused on sustainable weed control solutions, and the other is focused on cell sciences and imaging. Both teams help ensure farmers have the tools they need to grow our food.

My love for science started at a young age. I grew up in [Quito, Ecuador](#), and was exposed to the [rich biodiversity](#) throughout the country. As a young boy, I was filled with curiosity when it came to farming and I spent hours exploring outdoors to see what wonders I could find. I would

analyze the soil, examine the crops, and constantly be on the lookout for the animals who called our farm home. As I got older, I started to better understand the intricacies surrounding farming, especially in our farm near Quito and my community.

Growing up, I was also an avid gymnast. Training daily, gymnastics was about discipline, focus, perseverance and sportsmanship. The highlight of my gymnastics career was when I represented Ecuador at the 1993 World Championships in Paris. Through gymnastics I could travel the world, and ultimately it is the gymnastics program at [East Stroudsburg University in Pennsylvania](#) that led me to the United States. But two years later, the program ended, and I was left wondering what I should do next. I remembered the challenges my family experienced in farming as I grew up. One year, we lost our entire harvest to a hailstorm. Managing those kinds of situations is what ultimately encouraged me to dedicate my career to science.

With every challenge comes an opportunity.

When my career as a gymnast ended, it also marked my start as a scientist. I enrolled at [Western Michigan University](#) and focused on molecular and plant biology. I reclaimed my love for science while working on [monarch butterfly research](#), and embarked on my path to becoming a scientist.

Advocating for science on social media.

I strongly believe that scientists today are responsible for more than research. We are also responsible for advocating for science, and communicating with a non-scientific audience. For me, being active on

social media allows me to share my story, answer questions, and be part of the conversation. For example, last year I wrote a blog post about sugar beets and sugar cane. Shortly after, I was on Twitter and saw someone who was tweeting questions about the environmental impacts of growing sugar beets. I quickly responded to her and shared the blog post I had written. Social media allowed me to answer her questions and help her learn more about the sugar industry in a matter of minutes.

Social media may be a challenging space for scientists because it's filled with extremes. But channeling your voice, finding that balance while being respectful, and searching for common ground is always a good start when engaging on any social platform. There are people who want to hear from you and learn about what you do, so take time to make those connections and have those conversations. We [need more scientists on social media](#), and we need more scientists who can inspire the next generation.

Follow me on [Twitter](#) or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#).