

2020 Election

American Society of Plant Biologists

- **Election Procedures:** On the electronic ballot card, mark your choice of candidates for elected office.

President-elect

(to serve as president 2021–2022)



Katayoon (Katie) Dehesh

From its inception in 1924, ASPB has met daunting challenges but has never ceased to serve the global scientific community, aiding our common scientific quest to explore uncharted waters and providing a vehicle for our shared bond that transcends national, ethnic, gender, and social divides. In the current era of increasingly unexpected political and economic uncertainties, ASPB once again will rise to the

occasion in dealing with the unprecedented hurdles that have emerged. These hurdles are likely to disproportionately impact our early career and underrepresented groups. As president, I would like to increase the career-focused opportunities for our students, postdoctoral fellows, and early career colleagues by amplifying the voice of ASPB in various public and private sectors and by enhancing our engagement in society at large. Toward this goal, I would initially form an advisory council representing educators, governmental granting agencies, politicians, businessmen, and farmers to formulate approaches to implementing this endeavor.

I am currently the director of the Institute of Integrative Genome Biology at the University of California, Riverside (UCR), and a distinguished professor in molecular biochemistry. My research focus is on the evolutionarily conserved stress signaling and transduction pathways shared between plants and other organisms, such as eubacteria and Apicomplexa, as a means to providing an integrated view of the origins and patterns of divergence in adaptive networks. Previously, while at UC Davis, I served as chair of the Plant Biology Graduate Program and chair of the Emphasis in Biotechnology Program, where we expanded our educational program to include industrial experience by actively involving various industrial partners in agricultural and medical fields. Prior to joining the academic ranks, I worked for 10 years in the plant biotechnology sector, generating 11 patents.

I obtained my BSc from Pahlavi University in Shiraz, Iran, where I was introduced to salt-loving plants (halophytes) that grow on unimaginably high salt-containing ground. This initiated an interest that led me to continue my higher education at Sussex University, UK, an institute well known for its work in this area. Upon receiving my PhD, I traveled back to Iran for a visit with the intention of continuing my postdoctoral training in the USA. Upon arrival,

however, I applied for and was offered an assistant professorship at the National University, Tehran. I accepted, planning on only a short stay. But soon after that, I was notified that I was banned from travel because of the compulsory military service for all MD or PhD women. In consequence, I remained in Iran, performing my service duties at the military barracks in the mornings and teaching classes at the National University in the evenings. Shortly thereafter, in 1979, I heard the bells of revolution, but did not anticipate the outcome. In 1980, because of my personal beliefs and convictions, I left Iran and went to Germany, where I eventually obtained a Habilitation (German equivalent of tenure track) position at the University of Keil, working on chlorophyll biosynthesis enzymes. Being the only foreigner and only woman Habilitant in the institute, although intimidating, offered me a unique opportunity to positively impact and empower the female graduate students in the institute. Later, I was granted a sabbatical leave to go to the University of Madison-Wisconsin to learn much-needed molecular techniques. After a year there, I resigned from my position in Germany and continued as a postdoctoral fellow in Madison, and later at the Plant Gene Expression center in Berkeley/Albany, working on the transcriptional regulation of phytochrome. Upon gaining experience in both molecular and biochemical techniques, I joined Calgene, a small but powerful biotech company in Davis, where I began working in the area of lipid biochemistry with the aim of identifying novel enzymes for production of medicinal oils in plants. In 1999, Calgene was acquired by Monsanto, and I continued my research as the lead lipid scientist for three more years before resigning to join UC Davis as a full professor. There, I initiated de novo several funded research programs based on plant general stress responses. In 2016, I moved to UCR as the director of the Institute of Integrative Genome Biology, where I have initiated and established new core facilities focused on metabolomic analyses. It is my intention to expand the core activities to the training of undergraduate students in analytical techniques as a way to educate and provide a path to employment.

In the course of my career I have been honored with various awards, including Monsanto Fellow, several teaching awards at UC Davis, and election to the German National Academy of Sciences (Leopoldina) in 2017.

I first joined ASPB in 1998, and I am currently serving on the Hoagland Award Committee. I previously (2013-2019) served on the ASPB Publications Committee, which administers the ASPB/AAAS Mass Media Science & Engineering Fellowship.

My mantra is POWER, as my dream is to empower the young and strengthen their belief in the power of determination and positive thinking. And yes we can!