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ASPBnews

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF PLANT BIOLOGISTS

13 Perspectives on
Engagement and Leadership
Development in ASPB

15 Breaking Barriers, Building
Community: A Nigerian
Woman's Path in Plant Science

19 A Century of Discovery,
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Centennial Compendium



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A New Year to Draw Strength from our Work Together

BY KENT CHAPMAN, ASPB PRESIDENT

Greetings ASPB community! I know that 2025 was both disruptive and consequential for many of you. I am thankful for the many ASPB members that worked together to help mitigate the negative impacts for our community. As we enter 2026, there are many exciting things on the horizon for ASPB to look forward to. A few of these are summarized below.

Our founding journal, *Plant Physiology*, celebrates its 100th year of publishing impactful research by our members. Look out for special Centennial programming at the Plant Biology 2026 meeting in Ottawa and say happy birthday to *Plant Physiology* with a birthday greeting. And check out the journal's most-cited article ever by Daniel Arnon entitled "Copper Enzymes in Isolated Chloroplasts. Polyphenoloxidase in Beta Vulgaris", 24(1), January 1949. This paper has been cited a remarkable 20,696 times, and with 12% of these citations coming in the last two years, it has had remarkable staying power! In addition, the search for a new Editor-in-Chief for *Plant Physiology* is in the final stages, and we hope to name a new EIC in the very near future to lead the journal into the next 100 years!

Nominations for 2026 ASPB Awards opened in mid-December and closed February 13, 2026. This year, nominations were sought for 13 awards. Award recipients will be named soon!

Most of the regional ASPB Sections are planning their meetings for spring. The Southern section met March 13-15, 2026, at the University of Louisiana, Lafayette. The Western section is scheduled for April 22, 2026, at the University of California, Berkeley

(joint with the Bay Area Plant Hub). The Midwest Section will meet April 24 – 26, 2026, at the University of Missouri. (Joint with Interdisciplinary Plant Group). The Northeast section will meet April 25 – 26, 2026, at the College of New Jersey. And the Mid-Atlantic section will meet May 27 – 28, 2026, at the University of Maryland, College Park. (Joint with UMD Plant Symposium)

ASPB Committees began their work for the current governance year in October of 2025. These committees and their members are engaged in wide-ranging activities to support our ASPB community. A few committee highlights follow (apologies to those not mentioned here; they will receive attention in the near future!). And please consider volunteering for an ASPB committee in service of your community. Just follow the instructions at <https://bit.ly/40EglPK>.

The ASPB program committee is working tirelessly to assemble exciting key elements for Plant Biology 2026, our annual ASPB meeting that will be held this year jointly with the Canadian Society of Plant Biologists (CSPB) in Ottawa, Canada, July 18-22, 2026. This year's meeting will feature five plenary symposia that will be live-streamed as part of an expanded Plant Biology Virtual footprint that will feature more virtual content, both before and after the in-person. Check out the meeting website for registration information (plantbiology.aspb.org), and make plans to join us in Ottawa this summer. The deadline for Early Bird registration for Plant Biology 2026 is April 15, 2026.

The Early Career Plant Scientists (ECPs) Section members are busy setting up webinars for a wide variety of topics including



Kent Chapman, ASPB President

“science communication,” “what I wish I had known before graduate school,” “what I wish I had known before postdoc,” and “getting prepared for your first conference.” Beyond these webinars, they are exploring new ways to bolster the community of early career scientists. For Plant Biology 2026, ECPS is working on a workshop. Additionally, they are planning for the 3MT[®] competition, QR quest, trivia, headshot booth, and providing travel support to early career scientists (ECRs) at Plant Biology 2026.

The ASPB International Committee (IC) has many efforts underway. IC members, Patricia Leon and Gabriel Toledo-Ortiz, co-organized the “Crops of the future” workshop on October 20, 2025, in Merida, Mexico, funded by the Templeton Foundation. Several IC members also attended the ASPB Mexico Section meeting jointly held with the Mexican Society for Biochemistry. Further,

ASPB Council

Council members highlighted in **blue** also serve on the Board of Directors.

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the IC is working to expand the ASPB-JSPP collaboration and organized a symposium held at the JSPP meeting in Tokyo, March 13-15, 2026. Through our MOU with the JSPP, any ASPB members wishing to attend this meeting were able to register at JSPP member rates. Cooperative interactions are also in place with our sibling society in India, and we are working on additional agreements with societies in Spain, Australia, and Taiwan.

The Membership Committee (MemComm) will hold a workshop at Plant Biology 2026 meeting entitled “Explore Plant Science Careers and Grow Your Network.” Some revisions and updates were made to the ASPB Ambassador program in support of the ASPB mission, and a call for new ambassadors concluded. And with support from the MemComm members, ASPB staff launched membership refresh campaign, which is designed to re-engage lapsed members and other contacts in ASPB’s database. The

recently concluded first phase of the campaign garnered 300 members, which corresponds to an impressive 15% growth in ASPB’s membership base!

In other efforts, ASPB governance and staff, collectively, have developed a strategic plan that will help guide our society through these challenging times, placing services for our membership at the heart of its priorities. As part of this strategic plan, a “360-degree” organizational review of ASPB will be conducted with a focus on how to prioritize member services, to improve organizational efficiencies, and to solidify our financial position. In support of this effort, please be on the lookout to offer your opinions of how ASPB might best serve your professional needs.

So, there are myriad ways in which ASPB is carrying out our mission “to promote plant science and plant scientists.” I hope your 2026 is off to a productive start, and remember that as members of our professional society, we are stronger together. 🌱

Out of the Lab, Onto the Hill

BY MIRACLE OSAZEE OMOREGBEE

On May 13, 2025, I had the privilege of stepping out of the lab and into the halls of Congress as part of a Hill Day organized by the American Society of Plant Biologists' Science Policy Committee (ASPB SPC) in collaboration with the Coalition for National Science Funding (CNSF). As part of our advocacy for federal science funding for Fiscal Year 2026, I participated in meetings with congressional staff to discuss the importance of sustained investment in research and STEM education. It was my first time engaging in direct advocacy on Capitol Hill, and it proved to be a powerful reminder that science doesn't stop at the bench—it shapes policy, and policy, in turn, shapes science.

As a graduate student at the University of Maryland (UMD) studying Plant Science, my research focuses on developing novel genome editing tools to help alleviate the issue of food insecurity and climate change. These tools are critical for building climate-resilient crops and strengthening our food systems—research that's only possible thanks to sustained federal support, such as the NSF's Plant Genome Research Program (PGRP) and USDA's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI), among others.

Our day began with a meeting with a legislative assistant in Representative Glenn Ivey's office. Rep. Ivey is a Democrat who represents the 4th District of Maryland (D-MD-4) and serves on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, which means he has a greater say on NSF funding levels than most congresspeople. Legislative assistants in congressional offices are invaluable staff who cover a wide range of topics, from science and research to taxes, energy, and veterans' affairs. Although Senate

staff may cover only one or two issues, staffers in the House of Representatives, where offices have smaller budgets and so fewer staff, often cover up to a dozen topics each. They rely on constituents, like me, to let them know what is important in our state and district.

We shared ASPB's support for the \$9.9 billion NSF budget request developed by the broader stakeholder community and emphasized how critical the Plant Genome Research Program is to fundamental science and agricultural innovation. I also highlighted NSF's ROOT&SHOOT program, which introduces young students to plant science and helps grow the next generation of researchers. The Legislative Assistant was incredibly receptive. She told us that Rep. Ivey strongly supports science funding and thanked us for putting a face to the impact of budget cuts. Another graduate student from UMD's School of Public Health shared how similar science programs influenced her academic and career choices, helping reinforce the broader value of continued investments in science.

One of our most inspiring meetings was with a senior legislative assistant for Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD). This staffer was enthusiastic about the ROOT&SHOOT program, and she welcomed our push for greater science education and outreach funding. She also emphasized the Senator's strong support for science funding and thanked us for speaking directly to the challenges facing young researchers today. During the meeting, another student from UMD's Department of Geographical Sciences shared how her research—leveraging satellite data for agricultural modeling—has been directly impacted by recent budget cuts to NASA grant programs, a concern the staffer acknowledged as part of broader





conversations around protecting critical research funding across agencies.

It felt more challenging to connect with a legislative assistant from Representative Andy Harris's office (R-MD-1). Rep. Harris is the Chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, which means he has a significant impact on the USDA's research budget. We were excited to present our case for agricultural research funding, highlighting how federal research funding drives innovation and workforce development. Rep. Harris's staffer was kind, but we struggled to find topics that he appeared to find interesting or connected with his work. How a meeting feels for us as participants, however, is not the whole story. Rep. Harris subsequently crafted an appropriations bill for USDA that soundly rejected the majority of the Administration's proposed research cuts at USDA. Whether or not this particular staffer connected with our stories that day, Rep. Harris's office is clearly supportive of our efforts. Sharing our stories matters, and despite feeling that the conversation was one-sided, we left confident that we had done our best to tell engaging stories of research impacts in Rep. Harris's home state and district, stories that could well have made a difference in how Rep. Harris framed the Subcommittee's work.

Participating in this Spring's Hill Meetings was empowering. I realized that being a scientist doesn't mean staying in the lab—it also means advocating for the policies that make research possible. Our voices, especially as students and early-career researchers, matter. We bring lived experience and

BECOME AN ADVOCATE

Explore ASPB's resources to advocate for policies supporting plant biology research.

SCAN ME

urgency to the conversation, which can make a lasting impression on policymakers. If you're reading this and wondering whether to get involved in science policy or advocacy,

my advice is simple: **do it!** Whether you're working on plant science-related research or any other form of science, your perspective is critical to shaping the future of science. 🌱

ASPB Advocacy in Action

As part of its regular advocacy efforts, ASPB works with Lewis-Burke Associates to identify and respond to opportunities to join coalitions in communicating with key stakeholders in Congress about causes relevant to plant biology. These activities are shared regularly online. The following are some of the latest activities from ASPB.

Supporting Bold Innovation in Agricultural Research: Why AGARDA Funding Matters

As Congress begins work on the Fiscal Year 2027 appropriations process, ASPB joined a broad coalition of scientific societies, research institutions, and agricultural stakeholders in calling for increased investment in the Agriculture Advanced Research and Development Authority (AGARDA).

In a joint letter to House and Senate Appropriations leaders, the coalition urges lawmakers to provide at least \$1 million, while striving toward \$10 million, in funding for AGARDA to ensure the program can launch meaningful, high-impact research initiatives.

Modeled after successful advanced research agencies such as DARPA, AGARDA represents a forward-looking approach to addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing agriculture today. From rising input costs to emerging pests and diseases, U.S. producers need science-driven solutions that can strengthen productivity, resilience, and global competitiveness. With adequate support, AGARDA can accelerate breakthroughs that benefit farmers, consumers, and the broader food system.

ASPB is proud to join this coalition effort to advocate for sustained and robust funding for

A Call for Investing in USDA's Agricultural Research Service

ASPB, together with a coalition of 56 other scientific societies, academic institutions, and industry partners, recently sent a letter to House and Senate Appropriations leaders to emphasize the critical role of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) and request necessary funding to keep ARS running. In the letter, the coalition requests \$1.877 billion for ARS salaries and expenses—a 5% increase over current funding levels—to ensure the agency can continue delivering the critical research that underpins U.S. agriculture.

“As USDA's chief intramural research agency, ARS conducts food and agricultural research at more than 90 research

locations nationwide and delivers science-based solutions that support American farmers, ranchers, consumers, and rural communities,” the letter states. ARS research has led to significant, long-term impacts, from developing disease-resistant crops and improving livestock management to advancing soil health practices and enhancing food safety. The agency also maintains essential national research infrastructure and datasets that enable innovation and deliver lasting returns on federal investment.

Investments in ARS sustain scientific capacity, preserve long-term experiments, and ensure the United States remains

Read the letter




agricultural research. Continued engagement from the scientific community remains essential to ensuring that innovation remains at the forefront of U.S. agriculture policy.

Read the ARS letter



globally competitive in agriculture and food systems innovation.

ASPB is proud to be part of this coalition effort to advocate for robust funding for ARS. 

Professor David Dennis, PhD, FRSC

1936 – 2025

Dr. David Thomas Dennis, Emeritus Professor of Biology at Queen's University at Kingston, Canada, and former President and CEO of Performance Plants Inc., passed away due to complications arising from cardiac failure on Tuesday, August 19, 2025, at Kingston General Hospital.

David was born in Preston, Lancashire, England, and was the oldest son of Thomas Richard Dennis, a cabinet maker. When David expressed an interest in attending university, his father tried to persuade him to take an apprenticeship with a local building firm instead, stating "People like us don't go to university." David ignored the paternal advice and was the first member of the Dennis family to engage in post-secondary education, gaining a First Class Honours in Botany from Leeds University. He remained at Leeds and studied for his doctoral degree with Professor R.D. Preston, investigating the structure of cellulose microfibrils from terrestrial plants and seaweeds. This resulted in a paper published in *Nature*. While at Leeds, David would trudge the Yorkshire Moors to attend dances at a women's college where he met Marjory Bowmer, his wife for the next 65 years.

David's first post-doctoral fellowship was at the National Research Council of Canada in Ottawa under the supervision of biophysicist Dr. J.R. Colvin, with whom he worked on the synthesis of cellulose by the bacterium *Acetobacter xylinum*. David was attracted to Canada by the tales his father had told him of working with Canadian soldiers during the Second World War, building bridges across canals in Caen as a Royal Engineer to aid the advancement of Canadian troops.

A second postdoctoral fellowship took him to UCLA where he worked with Professor Charles A. West on the synthetic pathway for gibberellic acid, elucidating the pathway from mevalonic acid to kaurenoic acid as the immediate precursor to GA. While at UCLA,

David became fascinated with the work done by the pioneer of metabolic regulation, Professor Danial E. Atkinson, and his studies on the regulation of animal enzymes. After returning to England and joining Unilever Corporation as a research scientist, David applied Atkinson's ideas and showed for the first time that plants had regulatory enzymes, such as phosphofructokinase, similar to those in animals. While studying ageing processes in plants, he discovered that the regulatory properties of PFK and NAD-dependent isocitrate dehydrogenase changed during senescence.

Returning to Canada in 1968, David took on an Associate Professorship position at Queen's University and swiftly built an international reputation as a plant biochemist. Early work with graduate student Ron Duggleby included seminal papers on the regulatory properties of PFK, NAD-dependent isocitrate dehydrogenase and glyceraldehyde phosphate dehydrogenase. After Professor David Canvin at Queen's demonstrated that fatty acids were synthesised in plastids in castor endosperm, David hypothesized that the source of carbon for this may require the compartmentation of glycolytic enzymes. David's research showed this to be the case, with glycolytic isozymes occurring between the cytoplasm and plastids. Development of molecular biology techniques in the 1980s led to the characterization of genes for plastid and cytosolic isozymes, showing these to be quite distinct proteins. The uptake of proteins into plastids was also studied.

The importance of carbohydrate metabolism between plastids and cytosol is now well recognised, and David's work in this field is considered to be his most important contribution to plant science. A conference in Edinburgh in 1990 was devoted to compartmentation in plant metabolism during which David, as keynote speaker, was introduced as the father of this field of research.

David resigned from Queen's in 1996 and incorporated Performance Plants, a biotechnology company focussing on the development of plants resistant to environmental stresses such as drought and high temperature. The company expanded rapidly, with laboratories in Kingston, Saskatoon, and Syracuse employing 50 people. David was President and CEO of Performance Plants until 2006, then CEO until his retirement in 2008. The company continues to thrive in Kingston under the direction of CEO Yafan Huang, one of the many graduate students David supervised who went on to establish stellar careers in plant science.

David was known for his keen sense of fun. He had a passion for gardening, dogs, horses, good beer, better wine and the very best Scotch. As Head of the Biology Department at Queen's between 1984 and 1992 he instigated the annual (and infamous) Christmas Pantomime, and was a co-conspirator in beer brewing competitions, wine-making fiascos, golf tournaments, and the never to be forgotten (and never to be repeated) Biology Department Pig Roast. During the ill-fated Biology Department Slide Lake Loop Hike in Frontenac Provincial Park, he demonstrated that his leadership skills did not extend to navigation. As CEO of Performance Plants, the annual staff barbecue he hosted at his 30-acre property north of Kingston was legendary.

With David's passing, plant science lost one of its most influential contributing scientists, a complex and colourful character, and a great guy to work with.

David is survived by his wife, Marjory Dennis, and his sons Roger and Bruce. 🍀



Obituary written by long-time friend and colleague, Dr. Stephen Hunt, Adjunct Professor, Department of Biology, Queen's University; President and CEO, Qubit Systems Inc.

ASPB Membership: At the Heart of Our Society — Join Us, Shape the Future!

BY ARUNA KILARU, CHAIR, ASPB MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

As Chair of the Membership Committee, I invite you to take a closer look at one of the most dynamic and impactful committees within the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB). Whether you are a long-time member or new to the society, there has never been a better time to engage more deeply—by renewing your membership, encouraging others to join, or stepping up to serve.



Why ASPB Membership Matters

ASPB's strength comes from its members—those who conduct and communicate plant science at the highest levels, who mentor the next generation of researchers, and who promote the value of science in society. Our current membership stands at approximately **2,500**, representing a vibrant and diverse community spanning academia, industry, government, and education. Through our digital hub, *Plantae*, and via social media we connect with more than **30,000** individuals around the world—an unmatched reach that allows us to share science, resources, opportunities, and inspiration across borders and generations.

Being a member means more than subscribing to journals or receiving discounts to attend our flagship Plant Biology meetings. It's about being part of a community that values excellence, collaboration, equity, and innovation in plant science.

The Membership Committee: The Heartbeat of ASPB

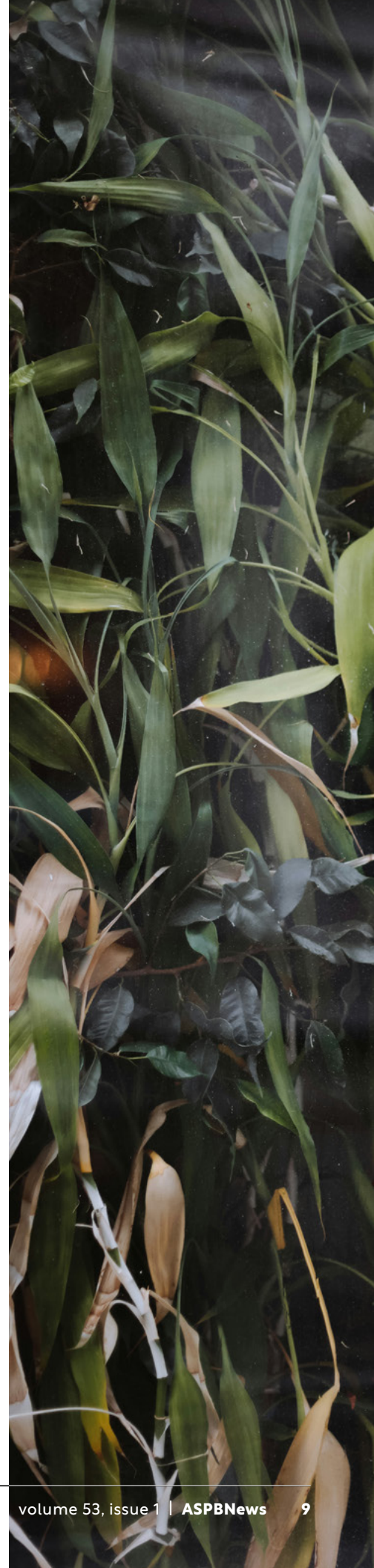
What makes the ASPB Membership Committee unique is its intersection with every other corner of the society. We collaborate with the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee to create a welcoming space for all; with the Education Committee to develop engaging resources for teachers and students; with the Early Career Plant Scientists Section to support our rising stars; and with the International Committee to expand our global footprint. Our work directly impacts the vitality of the society by focusing on who we are, how we grow, and what we stand for.

Our committee is made up of dedicated plant scientists at various career stages and from diverse backgrounds, and we welcome fresh voices and perspectives. Serving on the Membership Committee offers a unique opportunity to shape strategic decisions that influence ASPB's future—including membership models, outreach strategies, and society sustainability.

Ready to Join or Get Involved?

Whether you're renewing your membership or considering service on the Membership Committee, your engagement is vital. Visit aspb.org/membership to learn more, and please feel free to reach out if you're interested in volunteering or have ideas on how ASPB can better serve you.

Together, let's grow our society and strengthen the plant science community worldwide. 🌱



Welcome New Members of ASPB!

New members joining June 1, 2025-December 31, 2025. Name and information as provided by member.

Oluwapelumi Adekunle
Covenant University

Cheryl Adeva

Muhammad Yasir Afzal
South Dakota State University

Suhaib Ahmad

Aftab Ahmad
University of Southern
Queensland

Imtiaz Ahmad

Rasel Ahmed

Fatai Akande
International Institute of
Tropical Agriculture (IITA)
Headquarters, Nigeria

Parveen Akhtar
Biological Research
Centre, Szeged

Lawrence Akinro
Federal University of
Agriculture, Makurdi

Erin Alberts
University of Wisconsin-
Madison

Marwa Al-Hinai

Atharv Ambekar

Nicholas Ampimah

Tzahi Arazi
ARO, Volcani Institute

Arsalan Arsalan
University of Potsdam

Ayesha Arshad
University of Agriculture,
Faisalabad, Pakistan

Gulab Chand Arya
School of Biotechnology,
KIIT University

Emmanuel Asiedu

Vincenzo Averello
University of Minnesota

Fengoula Avgeri
Agricultural University
of Athens

**Fortune Ogo-ndah
Awala**

Ignatius Ajuru University of
Education, Rivers State, Nigeria

Priyanka Babuta
National Institute of Plant
Genome Research

Anna Baldisseri
Sant'Anna School of
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Patricia Baldrich

Olivia Baldwin
San Diego State University

Joseph Balem
The University of Georgia

Sonia Balyan
Indian Biological Data
Centre, Regional Centre
for Biotechnology

Diptadeep Basak
Michigan State University

Sara Belcapo
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University of Kentucky

YU-CHI Chen

Serene Cheng

Caitlin Clarke
Alfred University

Clarice Coyne

Alexander Cummins

Sapna Dama
BRIC- National Agri-food and
Biomufacturing Institute,
Mohali, Punjab, India

Cael Dant
Northwestern University

Flavia Soledad Darqui
Instituto de Biotecnología INTA

Deepak Das

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Chiara Degli Esposti
"La Sapienza"
University of Rome

Vikas Devkar
Texas Tech University

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University of Pennsylvania

Tianrun Li

Judith Lichtenzveig
The University of
Western Australia

Hyunjin Lim
SEJONG University

Sean Lindert

Penelope Lindsay
Oregon State University

YANG Liu
Cornell University

Zhiyuan Liu
Texas Tech University

Zhihui Liu

Raymond Liu
University of Toronto

Thomas Lock
John Innes Centre

Alessandra Lombardi
SLU - Swedish University
of Agriculture

Montserrat Lopez-Coria

Lloyd Loza Muller

Yu Shi Luan

Lewis Lukens

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University of Kentucky

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Ka Wai Ma

Ramya Madabathula

Keira Mahon

Mohit Mantri

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University of California, Irvine

Kayla Martinez
North Central College

**Coral Martínez
Martínez**
University of Wisconsin

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Solis Agrosiences

Stephanie Mata-Bonilla

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North Dakota State University

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Sean McGuire
Washington State University

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Colorado School of Mines

Trevor Melusen

Catherine Mercado
Michigan State University

Hannah Meyers
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Amrit Kumar Mishra
James Cook University

Madison Mitchell
The Stowers Institute for
Medical Research

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University of Saskatchewan

Saou Mohamed
UNIVERSITY MOHAMED
6 POLYTECHNIQUE

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Washington University
in St Louis

Gabriel Mourão
Sao Paulo State University
(UNESP) - School of
Agricultural and Veterinarian
Sciences (FCAV)

**SAYAN
MUKHERJEE**

Shahid Mukhtar
Clemson University

Ahmed Mukhtar
Northwest A&F University

Taylor Mydlarz

Erik Myers
University of Minnesota

**Lakshmi Meghana
Nallagari**
West Virginia State University

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Shakunthala Natarajan
University of Bonn

Sonia Navvuru
University of Alberta

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Iowa State University

Ruth Nichols
Cornell University

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University of Florida

Marcin Nowicki

Olamilekan Ogundipe
Obafemi Awolowo University

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Lincoln University

**Rakshana
Palaniswamy**

Xue Pan

Nattiwong Pankasem

**Sneha Priya
Pappula Reddy**
UWA (The University of
Western Australia)

Dr. Poonam Patel
Gujarat Biotechnology
Research Centre

**Shivasharanappa
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University Of Toronto

Emilia Pini
INRAE

Julia Ponczek
University of British
Columbia Okanagan

Anna Pruitt
University of California,
Davis and HHMI

Welcome New Members of ASPB!

New members joining June 1, 2025-December 31, 2025. Name and information as provided by member.

Aswathi PV

Yinyao Qi

Hong Kong Baptist University

Lenie Quiatchon Baeza

University of the Philippines Los Baños

Fergie Ann Quilloy

The University of Queensland

Kanishka Rajoria

*Indian Institute of Science
Education and Research, Pune*

Sahithi Ramireddy

West Virginia State University

Divya Rana

Ahmed Raslan

Iowa state university

Allan Rasmusson

Lund University

Francia Ravelombola

University of Missouri

Rishav Ray

University of California, Davis

Richard Rees

RR Consulting

Mahatab Azmaine Refat

Sami Ur Rehman

*College of Horticulture and
Forestry Sciences*

Karel Riha

Leire Rivero Brouard

*Center for Research in Agricultural
Genomics (CRAG)*

Mayuri Sadoine

University of Lyon

Karina San Vicente Trujillo

Francisco Sánchez Rodríguez
*Consejo Superior de Investigaciones
Científicas (CSIC)*

Shubroto Kumar Sarkar

University of Washington Seattle

Malarvizhi Sathasivam

Clemson University

James Satterlee

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Jared Levi Schneider

Jorg Schwender

Sumita Sen

Gunjan Sharma

University of Birmingham

Swastika Sharma

Lincoln University of Missouri

Nancy Shedd

FNU Shumayla

University of Maryland

Elizabeth Siaw

Rutgers University

Jagdeep Singh Sidhu

South Dakota State University

Carl Simmons

*Washington University in
St. Louis (WashU)*

June Simpson

CINVESTAV

Susan Singer

St Olaf College

Manjit Singh

Anil Singh

University of Minnesota

Harmeet Singh

University of Missouri-Columbia

Pramod Sivan

KTH Royal Institute of Technology

Sam Smalley

Devin Smith

Chandler Sprueill

Reed College

Deevita Srivastava

NDSU

Minviluz Stacey

University of Missouri

Jianbin Su

University of Missouri

Joel Swift

University of Kansas

Earl Taliercio

Sumaira Tayyeba

Waksman Institute of Microbiology

Mai Thai

Sherinmol Thomas

Donald Danforth Plant Science Center

Ran Tian

Texas Tech University

Tuan Tran

University of South Alabama

Nicola Trozzi

University of Lausanne

Yu-Te Tseng

University of California davis

Yanis Vasquez

University of Arkansas

Sabina Villadangos

Maggie Wagner

Zhibo Wang

Donald Danforth Plant Science Center

Xinhua Wang

Wisconsin Crop Innovation Center

Hasini Geethma

Wanigasinghe

*Department of Biology,
University of Saskatchewan*

Shanice Webster

Duke University

Tristan Weers

Iowa State University

Tania Wiest

Brigette Williams

Mark Williams

Charlay Wood

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Shangwei Wu

Hong Kong Baptist University

Meimei Xu

Iowa State University

Carolina Yanez

Instituto de Biotecnología UNAM

Bao Yang

UMSL

Jing Yi

University of Massachusetts

Georgia Yiasoumi

John Innes Centre

Yanbin Yin

University of Nebraska Lincoln

Yordan Yordanov

Hana Zand Karimi

Viktor Zarsky

*Charles University and Inst. of
Exp. Botany CAS, Prague*

Jingjing Zhai

Lei Zhang

University of Georgia

Liyong Zhang

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada

Rose Zhang

Australian National University

Bingxu Zhang

Hong Kong Baptist University

Jianan Zhang

Hong Kong Baptist University

Reo Zukoshi

Xu Zuowei

Hong Kong Baptist University



Perspectives on Engagement and Leadership Development in ASPB

BY STEPHANIE HOULE, PHD (BAYER CROP SCIENCE, ASPB MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE)

I recently interviewed three current leaders who shared their perspectives on society engagement and passion for early career leadership development opportunities in ASPB. Georg Jander (Boyce Thompson Institute, ASPB Science Policy Chair), Leeann Thornton (The College of New Jersey, outgoing ASPB President), and Tessa Burch-Smith (Donald Danforth Plant Science Center (DDPSC), incoming ASPB President) have each been members of the society for several years. During their time, they've honed their leadership skills through both formal and non-formal commitments in the society, leading them to positions of impact within the society and enhancing their careers outside of ASPB.

As she transitions out of ASPB leadership, outgoing president Leeann expressed her desire for members to see the richness of engaging with the society. She emphasized that the variety of leadership opportunities in the society can "...vary in depth of commitment and skills needed for the roles. The most important thing is a willingness to make space to fully engage in the work needed, so it is important that you are aware of the expectations for any role. It should challenge you to broaden your skill set, but it should not be so far out of your comfort zone that you feel unable to contribute."



Stephanie Houle, PhD
(Bayer Crop Science, ASPB Membership Committee)



Leeann Thornton
(The College of New Jersey,
Past ASPB President)

Long-term opportunities for leadership development include joining a formal committee as a standing member (3-4 year terms), or as an Early Career Representative (typically a 2-year term). However, there are also shorter-term opportunities. Leeann shared that "...many short-term projects are needed for national and regional conferences. If you engage well, and build respect and connections, there are opportunities to take on leadership positions to plan, organize, and carry out the work needed over a multi-year period." Some other short-term projects include working on award nominations, or ad hoc committees. Tessa agreed and mentioned that through "...opportunities like organizing and chairing a concurrent or other session at the annual Plant Biology meeting, one can develop their interpersonal and leadership skills."

Tessa and Leeann both emphasized the importance of early career scientists in the society. "Serving on a committee as a representative...gives early career scientists the chance to observe leaders and develop their own goals and vision for their leadership styles," commented Tessa. "It gives early career scientists an opportunity to see how all the committees and leadership boards carry out the ASPB mission. It is very


important for ASPB to have insight and perspective from early career scientists in all the decision making because the needs of our members are constantly evolving as the world and science policies change," Leeann said.

Early and active engagement in ASPB provides a platform to connect with scientists in related fields, which may not always be possible at home institutions. Leeann shared: "I am the only professor on my campus who studies plant molecular biology in model systems, so my ASPB connections and activities have been very important to connect me to the broader plant science community." Likewise, Georg highlighted that the network he has built through attending the annual meetings has increased his visibility in the plant science community. "The most important aspect of ASPB membership is the ability to make connections with other plant scientists. It also provides opportunities to more generally advocate for plant research and education in the United States."

Tessa shared that ASPB has allowed her "...to build a strong network of peers who give objective, critical feedback that has helped improve [her] leadership skills." This includes organizational and logistical skills through volunteering on workshop



Tessa Burch-Smith
(Donald Danforth Plant
Science Center (DDPSC),
ASPB President-elect)




“The most important aspect of ASPB membership is the ability to make connections with other plant scientists. It also provides opportunities to more generally advocate for plant research and education in the United States.”

— Georg Jander

and conference projects, and interpersonal communication skills through interactions with peers and the public. “Serving on the Science Policy Committee allowed me to hone my skills in delegation and to build trust in others’ ability to complete tasks competently.” Additionally, Leeann shared that she has relied on ASPB for mentoring and career advice as she navigated professional steps and new directions for her research. “Make sure you have support from mentors and colleagues. It is always wise to talk to multiple people about how all your professional activities fit together to move you along in a desirable direction for your career.”

The skills they have developed through ASPB leadership experiences have been implemented in their work outside of the society as well. “The problem solving, negotiations, strategic planning, and perspective of working with people from all over the world helps me do my job at TCNJ better. It helps me to be more culturally aware, more in-tune with global issues, and up to date on best practices in science education,” shared Leeann. Introducing younger generations to plant biology is a passion shared by all three, and the interpersonal and leadership skills

learned through ASPB experiences have enhanced these interactions. Leeann mentors undergrads at her primarily undergraduate institution and Tessa and Georg are active in the Research Education for Undergraduates (REU) program. Tessa is currently serving as the Director for the program at DDPSC, while Georg has been a principal investigator in the program for the past 20 years. Training through ASPB has helped Leeann “...be more aware of equity and inclusion issues and barriers that need to be removed at the society, institution, lab, and classroom levels.”

As incoming president, Tessa offered some inspiring advice for new ASPB members looking for leadership development. The society offers “...excellent opportunities for working with and leading peers towards a common goal... It is important to remember that good leadership is service. Take advantage of small opportunities ASPB presents to hone your skills and ideas. Develop your own goals and vision for your leadership style by observing successful leaders and their skills. Also, don’t be afraid to step into a role that you think is bigger than you are, but be willing to seek and take advice as well as to admit and correct mistakes.” 



Georg Jander (Boyce Thompson Institute, ASPB Science Policy Chair)

Breaking Barriers, Building Community: A Nigerian Woman's Path in Plant Science

BY DEBORAH OFURE IGHALO

In 2014, I was admitted to the University of Benin in Nigeria to study Plant Biology and Biotechnology. It was not a particularly popular or “prestigious” course, especially in a developing country where degrees like medicine, law, and accounting are often seen as the surest paths to economic stability. For parents, particularly those who did not have the privilege of a tertiary education, these were the dreams they passed on to their children.

My parents were not thrilled about my choice, but after being home for three years post-secondary school, I was eager to take the opportunity and make something of it. I packed my suitcase and, with little idea of what the next four years would hold, left home for the first time to begin my journey.

During my second year, something happened that quietly shifted the course of my life. I was sitting in a crowded lecture hall of over 300 students when someone announced that our Plant Biochemistry lecturer would be away for two years. She had received something called the Commonwealth Scholarship. I did not fully understand what that meant at the time, but a seed was planted in me that day. I made a quiet promise to myself: I would make the most of my time in school and pursue graduate studies abroad.

Access to the broader plant biology community in Nigeria is limited, especially for students. Though associations exist, it is entirely possible to go through an undergraduate program without ever being exposed to them, which was the case for me.

After graduating, I focused all my energy on one goal: pursuing graduate school in the United States. I sought experience by applying to intern at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), one of the country's prominent agricultural institutes, but I met a door that remained shut, despite my qualifications and determination. Growing up in Nigeria, I had already learned what it meant to navigate the world as a woman in spaces not designed for us. That lesson echoed again during this time. Opportunities were scarce, and access was shaped more by influence, networks, and unspoken expectations than by merit. Eventually, I found an opportunity in a smaller organization, Zodel Biotech, while preparing for graduate school applications. I began sending out cold emails and submitting applications.

Then, I was admitted to East Tennessee State University.

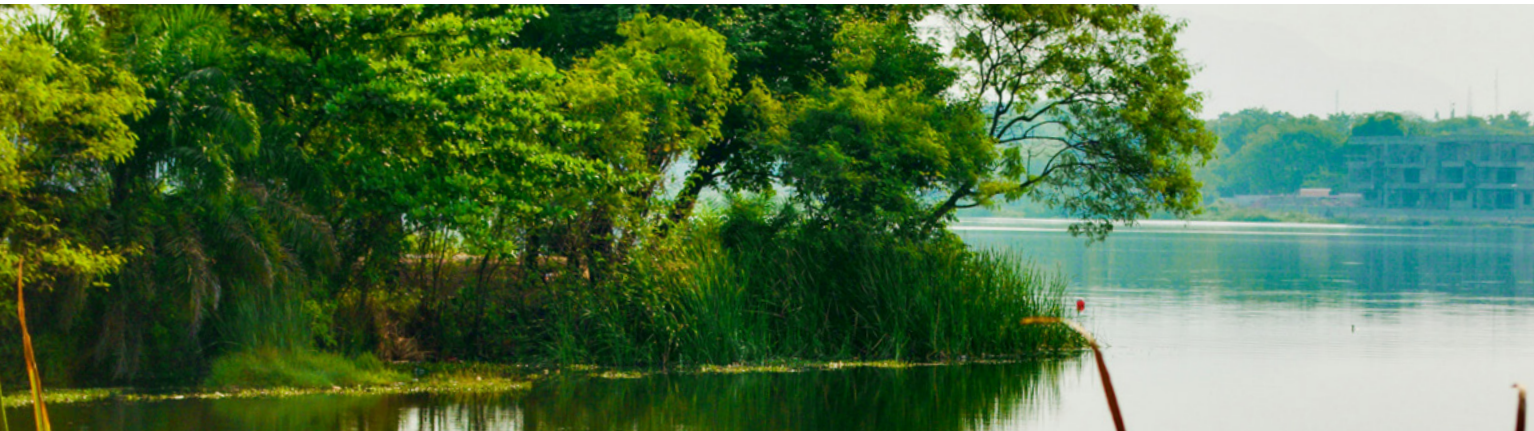
Arriving in America for the first time was both exhilarating and overwhelming. It was the farthest I had ever been from home and family. The excitement of achieving my dream quickly gave way to uncertainty. I had started in the spring semester, and the first thing that hit me was the biting cold, no number of layers could protect me. Everything felt fast, unfamiliar, and disorienting. I struggled to catch up in class. The culture shock was real. I had expected differences but was not prepared for the emotional toll they would take. Slowly, impostor syndrome began to creep in. *Maybe I didn't belong here*, I thought. The cold, the isolation, and the academic pressure all began to weigh heavily on me.



Then something changed.

I joined Dr. Kilaru's lab and became a member of the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB). For the first time, I felt like I had a community. I was fortunate to attend ASPB's centennial conference in Hawaii—my first major scientific conference. It was surreal. I met researchers whose papers I had studied, trying to lay the foundation for my own work. It felt, in a word, *unreal*.

At my supervisor's encouragement, I began attending workshops, the first of which was on impostor syndrome. It was a roundtable discussion, and for the first time, I heard others share similar struggles. I did not feel alone anymore. The warm smiles, kind gestures, and casual conversations; whether about the weather or navigating grad school made me feel like I was exactly where I was meant to be.



ASPB has shown a real commitment to building an inclusive scientific community. I have been especially inspired by the work of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and the Women in Plant Biology Committee. As a woman from an underrepresented background, these spaces resonate deeply. ASPB gave me something I had long yearned for, a sense of belonging in a field I once wasn't sure would ever welcome me.

Even now, as I continue my journey in the plant biology community, I often reflect on the many talented young scientists back home; those who still feel voiceless,

“
If there is one thing
I have learned, it
is visibility and
inclusion matter.
They are not optional.
They are the difference
between feeling
like an outsider and
realizing you belong.
”

disconnected, or unseen. I wonder what the future holds for those yearning for access, for recognition, for community. If there is one thing I have learned, it is visibility and inclusion matter. They are not optional. They are the difference between feeling like an outsider and realizing you belong.

In Nigeria, while we still face infrastructure and resources challenges, these should never be excuses not to grow. What we lack in resources, we can begin to rebuild through community, mentorship, and visibility. We must create environments that nurture early-career scientists and help students discover their path without stifling their potential. I hope to contribute by building bridges between underserved students and global scientific communities through mentorship, by creating visibility for careers in plant science, and by advocating for equitable research funding and exchange opportunities.

In the U.S., I want to continue uplifting the voices of international and first-generation students like me, those who may not always see themselves reflected in the institutions they worked so hard to enter. Our stories, our perspectives, and our presence matter.

Within ASPB, while I deeply appreciate the strides already taken toward inclusion, I believe more can be done. I want to remain engaged in the very spaces that helped me feel seen. More efforts should be made to connect with students and faculty at primarily undergraduate institutions (PUIs) and expand international outreach, especially to institutions in the Global South.

Through mentoring circles, travel grants, and regional outreach programs, we can ensure that no promising scientist feels invisible. In addition, I believe ASPB can amplify its global impact by building collaborations with scientific associations in underdeveloped countries. These partnerships could help foster capacity building, knowledge exchange, and greater inclusion of voices from regions that are often underrepresented in global scientific conversations.

Currently, as I complete my second year as a Ph.D. student, I am investigating the transcriptional regulation of oil biosynthesis in seed tissue using genes typically expressed in non-seed tissues. My research aims to provide insight into how we can enhance the production of heart-healthy oils in plants. As someone passionate about agriculture, I see this work as more than a scientific inquiry as it aligns with my advocacy for sustainable development. I am an advocate for UN's Sustainable Development Goals 2, 4, and 5: Zero Hunger, Quality Education, and Gender Equality. Eventually, I want to use my voice, research, and platform to continue championing these causes through education, mentorship, and inclusive scientific collaboration.

This journey continues to remind me that inclusion is not a favor; it is a responsibility. When we embrace that responsibility, we do not just make space for others; we help build a richer, more just, and more vibrant scientific community.

Because belonging should never be a privilege—it should be a given. 🌱

From First Introduction to Lasting Impact: My Journey with ASPB

BY AZAM NOORI, PHD

The first time I heard about the American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB), it was through my mentor who spoke highly of the organization and emphasized its professional and academic benefits. Their enthusiasm and recommendation left a strong impression on me, and when the opportunity arose, I did not hesitate to become a member. That decision has shaped my career in meaningful ways. Now, over a decade later, I can confidently say I have experienced the full range of benefits ASPB offers its members.

Through ASPB, I have had access to a wealth of educational resources that have enhanced my teaching and supported my

growth as an educator. Subscribing to *The Plant Cell*, *Plant Physiology*, and *Plant Direct* has kept me informed with the latest research in plant science, while regular newsletters from ASPB and *Plantae* ensure I stay up to date on new publications, opportunities, and events. One of the most valuable aspects of my membership has been attending the ASPB Annual Meetings. Thanks to the discounted member rate, I have been able to participate in nearly every conference since joining. These meetings have allowed me to attend high-quality workshops, connect with scientists in my field, and expand my professional network. Several of the colleagues I met through ASPB have even been invited as guest speakers

in my classes, enriching the experience for my students and fostering academic collaboration.

Beyond events and resources, ASPB has given me a sense of belonging in a vibrant scientific community. I have been able to give back to the society by becoming more actively involved, and I am proud to serve and contribute to the organization that has supported my career from the beginning.

Being a member of ASPB has not only kept me connected to the pulse of plant science but also helped me grow as a teacher, researcher, and member of the broader scientific community. I look forward to continuing this journey with ASPB in the years ahead. 🌱



Plant Biology

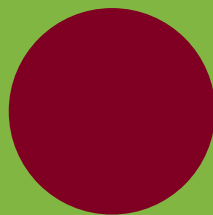
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A Century of Discovery, Preserved: The ASPB Centennial Compendium

What does 100 years of plant science look like? It looks like discovery layered upon discovery; fundamental insights into plant physiology, breakthroughs in molecular biology, advances in genomics, and a global community of scientists working to understand the organisms that sustain life on Earth. It looks like the collective effort of generations of researchers, educators, and students. And now, for the first time, it is all brought together in one place.

The ASPB Centennial Compendium: In Celebration of 100 Years of the American Society of Plant Biologists is more than a book—it is both a comprehensive educational resource and a lasting keepsake of a historic milestone in plant biology.

A Complete Resource

Over the past century, plant biology has evolved from foundational physiological studies to a dynamic, interdisciplinary field. The Centennial Compendium captures this evolution in remarkable depth and breadth.

Within its pages, readers will find:

- Expert-authored reviews that synthesize decades of research
- Historical perspectives that contextualize major scientific breakthroughs
- Insights into how plant science has shaped—and continues to shape—our understanding of life on Earth

For educators, the Compendium offers a ready-made teaching tool. Its curated content can support:

- Graduate and advanced undergraduate coursework
- Seminar discussions and journal clubs
- Reference materials for lab groups and research programs

For researchers, it serves as a scholarly touchstone, a way to trace the origins of key discoveries, revisit foundational work, and explore how ideas have developed across generations.

For students, it provides something even more powerful: perspective. By seeing how the field has evolved, emerging scientists can better understand where plant biology is headed, and how they can contribute to its future.

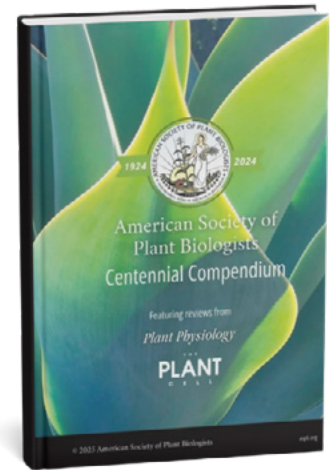
A Century in Context

ASPB has played a central role in shaping the field of plant science for 100 years. Through its journals, meetings, and community, ASPB has supported the dissemination of knowledge and fostered connections among scientists worldwide. This Compendium reflects that legacy. It brings together voices from across the discipline, capturing not just the science itself, but the community that made it possible. It is, in many ways, a map of plant biology’s intellectual journey.

A Book for Today and the Next 100 Years

The ASPB Centennial Compendium is a rare kind of publication: one that is equally at home in the classroom, the research lab, and the personal library. It is a record of where plant biology has been, a resource for where it is going, and a celebration of the community that continues to move it forward.

As ASPB enters its second century, this Compendium stands as both a milestone and a starting point, inviting readers to reflect, learn, and imagine what comes next. 🌱



“
This Compendium ... brings together voices from across the discipline, capturing not just the science itself, but the community that made it possible. It is, in many ways, a map of plant biology’s intellectual journey.
”



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Section Updates: ASPB Mid-Atlantic Section Summary of Section and meeting in 2025

ASPB-MAS leadership committee in 2025:

Dr. Vijay Tiwari (Chair), Dr. Daniel Rodríguez-Leal (Co-chair), Dr. Nicholas Santantonio (Secretary/Treasurer), Dr. Caren Chang (Section Representative). The committee met regularly over Zoom starting 8 months before the meeting organized in 2025.

ASPB-MAS and UMD Plant Symposium meeting.

Our annual meeting was organized by the leadership team with support from the extended committee and administrative personnel from the Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture. The meeting was held on May 28 and 29, at Edward St. John Learning and Teaching Center at University of Maryland, College Park. This two-day joint conference combined science, education, and social networking to promote interactions among students and faculty in the region. Our program contained six scientific sessions, two education workshops, two poster sessions, and one social event.

Traditionally, this joint conference has a great reputation of supporting junior faculty, postdocs, and students. Out of 15 confirmed speakers, six were at the Assistant Professor level and two were postdocs. We also selected several speakers from the attendees for oral presentations. During the two different poster sessions, we had participation from undergraduate students. Furthermore, one undergrad was selected to present their research during one of the sessions. To promote students' participation in the conference, we also gave away cash awards for poster presentations in two categories, one for postdoc researchers and graduate students and the other for undergraduates and high school students.

As part of our educational and outreach activities, we organized two workshops with

several panelists with the goal to promote career development of students and postdocs and to improve grant writing skills. The first workshop was a Career Development Workshop (Day 1) where we invited four speakers in academia and industry. These speakers shared their experience in their professional fields, as well as gave guidance to attendees on professional choices, opportunities and skills they need to develop to successfully join the workforce either in Academia or Industry/Private Sector. The second workshop was a Grant Development Workshop (Day 2). For this, we invited program officers from NSF, USDA-NIFA, and DOE. Attendees were able to interact with the officers and ask questions about the current and prospects of federal funding, workforce development and grant opportunities tailored to the students and postdocs. This workshop was especially useful for the early career scientists who are still navigating their ways to secure research and education fundings.

Attendance to the 2025 ASPB-MAS

symposium and Section Membership. We noted a ~13% increase in attendance to our 2025 (122 vs 139), and a slight decrease of membership (61) compared to 2024 (66).

We see a positive trend in attendance, and we are currently working on strategies to increase our membership roster. Notably, in 2025 our meeting hosted attendees from 28 distinct organizations, of which 19 are public institutions, 4 government agencies, and 4 industry/corporate. Among the attendees, we observed a good mix of faculty (25), graduate students (24), postdocs (22) and undergraduate students (8).

Election of new committee members.

In 2025, we had nominations for a new leadership team for this section. We are proud to say this new leadership team is highly diverse and 3 out of the 4 members are women. The new team was elected by voting from the ASPB-MAS members last year.

The new chair is Dr. Daniel Rodríguez-Leal (Assistant Professor, UMD); the new vice-chair is Dr. Nidhi Rawat (Associate Professor, UMD); the new treasurer/secretary is Dr. Xingyun Qi (Assistant Professor, Rutgers); the new Section Representative is Dr. Courtney Leisner (Assistant Professor, Virginia Tech). This new leadership will be responsible for organizing the 2026 ASPB-MAS and UMD Plant Symposium.

Plans for AY 2025-26. Our plans for this coming year are as follows: work on organizing the 2026 ASPB-MAS and UMD Plant Symposium. For 2026, we are going to organize a new workshop that will take a more hands-on approach on career development by organizing interactions with entrepreneurs and working together with them to develop proof-of-concepts that will be showcased and discussed during the meeting. We will work towards increasing our membership by promoting the meeting and changing our registration costs and strategy. We have secured funding for increased cash prizes to boost participation from students and postdocs during the session talks. We also increased the participation of graduate students and postdocs as chairs of scientific sessions to promote engagement and more participation from our early career scientists. 🌱

On behalf of the ASPB Mid-Atlantic Section Leadership Committee

Section Update: ASPB Primarily Undergraduate Institution (PUI) Section

Summary of Section and Steering Committee Activities: AY 2024 - 25

PUI Steering Committee Members. Csengele Barta, Jonathan Fitz Gerald, Ansul Lokdarshi, Azam Noori (Council and Membership Committee representative), Bryan Thines (co-chair), Dongfang Wang (Co-chair), Margaret Young. The committee met monthly over Zoom throughout the year.

Outreach. In addition to emails sent to members of our section through ASPB, the PUI section actively uses four social media accounts (Instagram, X, Bluesky, LinkedIn) to share upcoming activities, such as monthly virtual networking sessions, as well as other news of interest. Our most popular social media account is on Bluesky, which has more than 700 followers. Our monthly virtual networking sessions are a relaxed way to interact with other PUI faculty members nationwide, share innovative ideas, and have discussions pertaining to life and challenges specific to PUIs. Participants tend to include regular members of the PUI section and postdocs/grad students interested in this career path. This past year, we adopted themes for each session, such as publishing with undergraduates and productive ways to engage with AI. In addition, we also organized a seminar, titled *“The Tricks and Tips for Successfully Applying to PUIs,”* with two panelists from the ASPB PUI Steering Committee and one invited guest speaker, Dr. William Serson, a teaching faculty member from Penn State Lehigh Valley. This proved to be a very successful event, and we received informal feedback from early-career faculty attending the annual workshop at the 2025 Plant Biology attributing part of their success in securing a faculty position from the information shared and discussed during the workshop.

Programming at the Plant Biology Conference 2025. Our submitted proposal was selected for the conference program, and we spent the spring planning our PUI faculty development workshop: *“Work smarter not harder – time mastery techniques to maximize your plant science research productivity.”*

The workshop was attended by 50 – 60 participants. The first part of this workshop was a panel discussion with mid-career PUI faculty members, and the second part was a break-out session where participants developed goals and a personalized time management plan for the upcoming year. Resources were shared on Plantae afterward. The committee also reviewed applications and awarded \$10,000 in travel funds to nine individuals from PUIs to help enable conference attendance. Some PUI committee members led and/or participated in the “Explore Plant Science Careers” workshop. We also held our annual business meeting (open to anyone). During the business meeting our work for the year was summarized, and we spent time discussing two critical issues related to the future of our section: restoring section membership numbers to past levels (see below) and finding alternative sources of funding for travel grants to the conference. Funds given to the section from the Membership Committee covered PUI activities related to our work at this conference. In particular, the AV for our business meeting was \$661.67 and catering for our faculty development workshop was \$2339.46. We also requested some funds for panelist appreciate gifts.

Section Membership. We noted a decrease in PUI section membership this year compared to previous years; past levels exceeded 100

members, but in July our membership was around 60. This reduction matched the overall decline in membership across nearly all sections of ASPB. Among other possible reasons, the funding climate and the fact that many PUI members only pay for membership during years they attend Plant Biology were offered as reasons. Strategies to remedy this situation were discussed.

Election of new committee members. Nominations were advertised and an election was held for two new committee members. We added an extra member to the committee this year because three serving members will be rotating off at the end of the year, and adding two this year will ensure that there are always two members for every year on the committee. Brit Moss and Shiqi Zhang joined the PUI steering committee in August.

Plans for AY 2025-26. Briefly, our plans for this coming year are as follows: We have reached out to all past PUI section members and encouraged them to stay connected to the section by maintaining their membership (efforts here are being successful, and membership has increased by nearly 20%). Our proposal submission for the annual Faculty Development Workshop at Plant Biology 2026 was accepted, and we have begun planning our workshop entitled: *“Harnessing Artificial Intelligence (AI) to advance research productivity and integrate research-based teaching at PUIs.”* We continue our monthly networking sessions, but with added structure, more intentional design for postdocs and graduate students pursuing faculty positions at PUIs, and now geared towards long-term accessibility. These

Continued on page 23 ►

Section Update: ASPB Western Section

Summary of 2025 Section Activities

WESTERN SECTION OFFICERS: LAURA MARTINS (CHAIR), DIWAKER TRIPATHI (SECRETARY/TREASURER), AISHWARYA KOTHARI (MEETING ORGANIZER), MARCO BURGER (SECTION REPRESENTATIVE TO MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE AND COUNCIL).

1. 2025 Bay Area Plant Hub / ASPB Western Section Symposium

The primary activity of the Western Section in 2025 was jointly organizing the inaugural Bay Area Plant Hub / ASPB Western Section Symposium, held on April 16 at the William J. Rutter Center at UCSF Mission Bay. The symposium was organized by a committee of 22 plant scientists representing diverse career stages and institutions across the Bay Area, with leadership from Prof. José Dinneny (Stanford University/HHMI), early strategic guidance from Bill Burkholder (CZ Biohub SF), and logistical coordination by Ben Warner (CZ Biohub SF). ASPB's involvement helped amplify outreach through both national and Western Section specific channels, and ASPB provided financial support enabling travel for ASPB ambassadors and other representatives attending from outside the Bay Area. In addition, through the Plant Scholars Grant program, ASPB funded six \$200 travel awards to support attendance by individuals from diverse backgrounds, career stages, and areas of study.

a) Participation and Reach

The symposium attracted 370 in-person attendees and 40 virtual participants. Registration opened on January 23 and reached full capacity by March 12, prompting the addition of a waitlist and virtual attendance option. Participants came from a wide range of academic and research institutions, including UC Davis (107), UC Berkeley (81), Stanford University (57), the biotech sector (30), DOE National Labs (22), Carnegie Institution for Science (15), USDA (8), UC Santa Cruz (7), California State Universities (6), and CZ Biohub SF (4). Early-career researchers made up the largest cohort, with 225 participants, including 102 graduate students, 91 postdocs, and 32 undergraduates, alongside 37 principal investigators and 66 staff scientists and technicians.

b) Program Highlights

The single-day program featured three plenary sessions (two general and one themed on “Innovations in Sustainability”), a keynote session, lunchtime discussion tables, and an evening poster session with over 100 posters. Each plenary included four 15-minute research presentations and five 1-minute poster flash pitches, totaling 12 oral presentations and 15 poster pitches. The keynote, titled “Cultivating Innovative Plant Science in the Bay Area,” featured a 30-minute presentation by Prof. Pamela Ronald (UC Davis) followed by a panel discussion with Nathan Pumplin (Norfolk Healthy Produce), Elizabeth Sattely (Stanford University), and Brad Zamft (Heritable Agriculture), moderated by PhD student Vivian Zhong (Stanford). Approximately 250 participants took part in lunchtime breakout discussions covering six thematic areas, including Plant Synthetic Biology, Computational & Data-Driven Approaches, Biodiversity & Collections-Based Research, Community Outreach, Plant–Microbe Interactions & Sustainable Agriculture, and Biotech Startups in Plant Science.

c) Outcomes and Impact

A post-symposium survey of over 100 respondents reflected strong satisfaction: 96% rated the scientific program highly, 87% reported a strengthened sense of community, and 65% established new professional connections. The ASPB Western Section's involvement was rated valuable or highly valuable by 76% of respondents. Attendees praised the short talks from early-career researchers, poster pitches, themed lunch discussions, and the keynote and panel session. Suggestions for future improvements included expanding venue capacity, adjusting poster session timing, and enhancing facilitation of discussion tables. A strong majority (83%) favored continuing the event on an annual basis.



2. Election of New Section Leadership

The Western Section held elections for new leadership in November 2025. The newly elected officers are Laura Martins (Chair), Diwaker Tripathi (Secretary/Treasurer), and Aishwarya Kothari (Meeting Organizer). Marco Burger continues his term as Section Rep to Membership Committee and Council. This leadership team is now in place and guiding section activities going forward.

3. Looking Ahead

Building on the success of the inaugural symposium, the Western Section has been actively involved in planning the 2nd Bay Area Plant Hub / ASPB Western Section meeting together with Biohub SF, which will take place on April 22, 2026, at UC Berkeley. Our section will provide five \$250 travel grants to help members attend this annual meeting. Moreover, the section is actively seeking new members, as our leadership plans to implement activities such as webinars, a quarterly newsletter that includes the promotion of our members' publications, a stronger social media presence, and local mixers to increase networking opportunities. The new leadership team meets monthly through Zoom and is committed to growing section engagement and visibility within ASPB, and to strengthening connections between academia, industry, and agricultural stakeholders across the region. 🌱

Section Update: ASPB Primarily Undergraduate Institution (PUI) Section Summary of Section and Steering Committee Activities: AY 2024 - 25

Continued from page 21

resources are now archived as a dedicated “PUI Playbook series” on the *Plantae* YouTube channel (see sidebar at right). To date, this collection contains five videos that have collectively garnered over 500 views. We plan to expand our reach by committing to monthly or bimonthly content updates throughout the coming year. 🌱

Primarily Undergraduate Institutions Committee

Check out the PUI playlist on the *Plantae* YouTube channel:



<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL00AnAdRKTThcZGchKf9O9KfjHd4yoEh2>

WELCOME TO ASPB!

Shaun Duffy Joins as ASPB's Managing Editor

Shaun brings a wealth of experience to our publications team. She is a publishing professional with a decade of experience driving the development of multi-disciplinary scientific publications across three publishing houses. Over her career, Shaun has worked on content strategy in close partnership with clinician-scientists and society stakeholders, helping journals expand their impact in an evolving research landscape. Most recently at Taylor and Francis, Shaun oversaw a large portfolio of Ophthalmology and Nursing journals, collaborating with experts in the field to strengthen publication quality, reputation, and help build foundations for long-term success.

When she is not working, Shaun is passionate about gardening, hiking, reading, and animals—large and small. Within the past few years, she has relocated to her grandparents' homestead in the Northern Appalachian Mountains, where she has been working a plot of land her immigrant ancestors cultivated just three generations before her. When she is not gardening, Shaun enjoys reading about folk herbalism and ethnobotany, and spending as much time as possible with her dog, Vivian. Do not be surprised if Shaun has great advice on what to plant in your garden or fascinating stories about traditional plant uses! We have nothing but enthusiastic admiration for everything she loves doing! 🌱



Make deeper connections with your ASPB *community*.

There are currently nine sections of ASPB formed from geographical regions of the United States, Canada, and Mexico, as well as three interest-based sections. Each section maintains a member base and holds annual meetings or other events.

- Early Career Plant Scientists
- Environmental & Ecological Plant Physiology
- ASPB Mexico Section
- ASPB Mid-Atlantic US Section
- ASPB Midwestern US and Canada Section
- ASPB Northeast US Section
- Primarily Undergraduate Institutions
- ASPB Southern US Section
- ASPB Western US and Canada Section

Learn more at aspb.org/membership/aspb-sections

Building the Science of Plant Biology 2026

Inside the ASPB Program Committee Meeting

In February, members of the ASPB Program Committee gathered in Chicago for an intensive, collaborative meeting to shape the scientific program for Plant Biology 2026, taking place July 18–22 in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Over the course of the meeting, committee members carefully reviewed session proposals and hundreds of abstract submissions for concurrent symposia—an essential step in building a program that reflects both the breadth and depth of today’s plant science.

The process is both rigorous and highly collaborative. Drawing on their expertise across diverse areas of plant biology, committee members evaluate submissions

for scientific merit, originality, and relevance. Through thoughtful discussion and collective decision-making, they work to ensure that selected sessions highlight the latest advances in the field, from molecular mechanisms to ecosystem-level research, while also identifying emerging topics and new directions in plant science.

Equally important is the committee’s commitment to creating a well-rounded program that supports the professional growth of attendees at all career stages. In addition to cutting-edge research, the program includes sessions designed to foster career development, interdisciplinary collaboration, and community engagement.

This work is made possible by the dedication of ASPB volunteers—colleagues who generously contribute their time and expertise to serve the broader plant science community. Their efforts ensure that Plant Biology 2026 delivers a dynamic, inclusive, and forward-looking program that not only showcases scientific excellence but also strengthens the connections that drive the field forward.

The result of this collaborative effort will be a meeting that reflects the very best of plant biology today, shaped by the community, for the community. 🌱



Members of the ASPB Program Committee gathered in Chicago in February for an intensive, collaborative meeting to shape the scientific program for Plant Biology 2026, taking place July 18–22 in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada



ASPB Program Committee

Judy Brusslan,
Secretary; Chair

Tessa Burch Smith,
President-Elect

Ian Wallace,
Past Secretary

Virginia Miguel,
Early Career Representative

Gurleen Kaur,
Early Career Representative

David Horvath

Juan Dong

Kevin Cope

Yangnan Gu

Toyosi Ijato

Ling Li

Meet the 2026 Plantae Fellows

The American Society of Plant Biologists (ASPB) named 26 new Plantae Fellows to its 2026 cohort, an impressive group ready to bring their best to this resource for the global plant science community. Fellows are selected for their interest in and enthusiasm for growing the plant science community, as well as for their science communication skills, content curation skills, and ability to represent the perspectives of plant scientists in various fields.

Meet the 2026 ASPB Plantae Fellows



Gourav Arora

Gourav is a third year doctoral researcher in the Coupland department at the Max Planck Institute for Plant Breeding Research, Cologne. His work focuses on the regulation of flowering time in Arabidopsis, specifically through the FT-FD module. Originally from Haryana, Gourav completed his master's degree at the University of Delhi, India. Passionate about science communication, Gourav enjoys sharing scientific concepts with the general public. In his free time, he loves capturing the beauty of nature through photography, particularly flowers and plants. He also enjoys watching anime, playing table tennis, and reading Hindi poetry. X: @gourav_arora_g



Jahed Ahmed

Jahed is a Marie Curie Postdoctoral Fellow at the Laboratory of Membrane Biogenesis, CNRS/University of Bordeaux. His research focuses on deciphering the roles of reactive oxygen species and calcium signaling in plant-virus interactions, exploring how pathogens hijack host membrane nanodomains to facilitate infection.



Fatai Ayomide Akande

Fatai is a research assistant at the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture Headquarters in Nigeria, specializing in advancing crop resilience to biotic and abiotic stresses through molecular breeding, genomics, and bioinformatics. His research focuses on understanding and improving Striga resistance and drought adaptation in maize using gene expression studies, marker discovery, and validation. Fatai is passionate about applying integrative approaches to sustainable crop improvement. X: @AkandeAyomide20

About Plantae and the Plantae Fellows

ASPB's Plantae is widely known as a resource-rich platform featuring various articles, tools, and perspectives for plant biologists from around the world and at all stages of their careers. This endeavor wouldn't be possible without a cohort of motivated plant scientists who share their expertise and passion for plant science as Plantae Fellows.

The role of the Fellows is to help nurture and grow the Plantae community. For example, Fellows contribute to the Plant Science Research Weekly series, coordinate and moderate the Plantae webinars, share ideas for resources that are relevant to early career plant scientists, create and grow networks and create topical content for the Plantae community. Plantae Fellows also receive an inside view of the technology roadmap for the Plantae platform and provide feedback and direction as needed.



Krishna Chaitanya Alamuru

Krishna is a returning Plantae Fellow (2025–2026 cohort) and a PhD candidate at the Centre for Crop Health, University of Southern Queensland, Australia. His research focuses on plant pathology, genomics, and the genetic basis of disease resistance in mungbean. Krishna also serves as Secretary of the RAID Network (Researchers in Agriculture for International Development), a program supported by the Crawford Fund, where he contributes to strengthening international research collaborations and science communication initiatives. X @alamuru_krishna



Atharv Ambekar

Atharv is a second year PhD student at the Swammerdam Institute of Life Sciences (SILS) in University of Amsterdam (UvA). His current research focusses on the metabolic dialogue between plants and microorganisms in the rhizosphere, and its role in orchestration of biotic interactions in the rhizosphere. Owing to his prior research, he is also interested in Plant Pathogen interactions, effector biology, and evolutionary origins of pathogenicity. When not working, you'd find him reading non-fiction books, quizzing, or solving sudoku. X: @AtharvAmbekar2
Bluesky: @atharvambekar2.bsky.social



Reed Arneson

Reed is a PhD candidate at the College of Forest Resources and Environmental Science at Michigan Technological University. His research focuses on functional genetics in Populus plants to develop a greater understanding of tree stress response. He would like to apply the knowledge he has gained in both wet and dry lab procedures to develop crops more resilient to future challenges posed by climate change. X: @Reed_Arneson



Fengoula Avgeri

Fengoula is a recent PhD graduate in Plant Molecular Biology from the Agricultural University of Athens, Greece. Her research expertise focuses on plant proteostasis and mitochondrial biology, while she sees science as an adventure without boundaries. Beyond her scientific pursuits, she enjoys the company of a good book, hiking in nature, and creating illustrations. Bluesky: @fengoulaavgeri.bsky.social | X: @AvgeriF



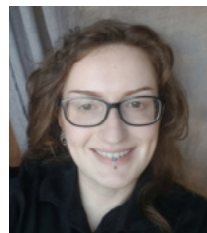
Priyanka Babuta

Priyanka is enthusiastic plant biologist, currently working as postdoctoral researcher at National Institute of plant Genome research, New Delhi, India. Her research resolves around free radical biology and nitric oxide signaling with the focus to decipher molecular insights into the S-nitrosylation and denitrosylation in plants. Beyond the lab research, she enjoys socializing with friends over coffee and traveling.



Sonia Balyan

Sonia is a Scientist at the Indian Biological Data Centre, Regional Centre for Biotechnology, where she leads the development of the Indian Crop Phenome Database (ICPD; <https://ibdc.dbtindia.gov.in/icpd/>) and other national-scale FAIR data resources. Her work spans biocuration, computational biology, and plant molecular biology, with contributions to understanding microRNA-mediated stress responses in crops. She is also the founder and host of the Beyond Shodh (www.youtube.com/@beyondshodh24) Podcast and serves on the Executive Committee of the International Society for Biocuration (ISB) and is also an active member of AgBiodata. Bluesky: @soniabalyan.bsky.social
X: @sonia_balyanBS



Cael Dant

Cael is finishing up an MS in plant biology and conservation at Northwestern University and the Chicago Botanic Garden. They love anything and everything to do with carnivorous plants, and their thesis research focuses on the ecology and physiology of the North American pitcher plant *Sarracenia purpurea*. Before graduate school, Cael spent five years working in government and international relations in Japan and still works as a Japanese-English translator while remaining involved in public policy from the science side. In their spare time they enjoy hiking, drawing, making pottery, crocheting, and growing plants.



Flavia Soledad Darqui

Flavia is a biotechnology graduate with a PhD in Biological Sciences, currently working as an assistant researcher at IABIMO, INTA, Argentina. Her research focuses on transformation and CRISPR-based gene editing of lettuce as a crop model system. At present, she is studying lettuce genes involved in abiotic stress responses by generating knockouts using CRISPR/Cas9.



Sophie Zoe Farkas

Sophie is a final-year PhD student at the University of Freiburg. Her research focuses on root system architecture, specifically the regulation of lateral root angle by genetic factors and environmental stimuli. When she's not in the lab, you can find her on the football field or playing tunes on her alto saxophone. Bluesky: @sophiezoe.bsky.social | X: @fsophiezoe



Adrián González Ortega-Villaizán

Adrián is a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for Plant Biotechnology and Genomics (CBGP) in Madrid (Spain) and he will soon be joining the University of Nottingham (UK). He studies how root-associated microbes influence plant growth and help plants cope with abiotic stresses, focusing on endophytic fungi from extreme environments and their interactions with *Arabidopsis thaliana* and tomato. Outside the lab, he is passionate about exploring nature and loves cycling. X: @adrigov98 | Bluesky: @adrigov.bsky.social



Jordan Hester-Moore

Jordan Hester-Moore is a returning student at University of Hawai'i at Mānoa pursuing a degree in plant biology and preparing to dive into ancient DNA research on Hawaiian Andisols, with the goal of illuminating past plant-soil interactions and supporting restoration of native ecosystems. She brings to the American Society of Plant Biologists Plantae Fellows cohort a dedication to sustainable landscape science, science communication, and growing inclusive networks for early-career plant scientists.



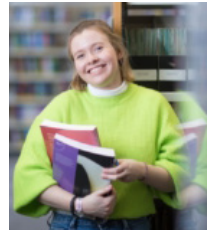
Deborah Ighalo

Deborah is a PhD student at East Tennessee State University, specializing in plant molecular biology and lipid metabolism. Her research focuses on the transcriptional regulation of oil biosynthesis in seed tissues using genes typically expressed in non-seed tissues, aiming to enhance the production of heart-healthy oils in plants. She is passionate about sustainable agriculture and actively supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2 (Zero Hunger), 4 (Quality Education), and 5 (Gender Equality). Outside of research, she enjoys music, reading, and writing.



Kavita Joshi

Kavita holds an MSc in Botany from Kumaon University, Nainital, India. Her research interests lie in ethnobotany and plant genomics, particularly in combining bioinformatics with experimental lab techniques to explore biosynthetic gene clusters and secondary metabolites with medicinal potential. On her free time, she likes crafting, gardening, and being an eco-explorer.



Anastasia Kolesnikova

Anastasia is a final year PhD student working on understanding whether there are any genetic reasons why some wild plants can be domesticated and others cannot. Her research interests span bioinformatics, omics analyses, plant evolution and orphan crops. In her spare time, she's a keen science communicator, tango dancer and enjoys looking after her allotment. X: @natplantsci



Alessandra Lombardi

Ale is a passionate plant scientist who likes to dive into the interplay between science, art, and communication. In their third year of their PhD in Uppsala, Sweden, they are studying evolutionary dynamics in plant speciation. Their research focuses on *Capsella* species as a model for the evolution of selfing.



Montserrat Lopez-Coria

Montserrat is a plant biology researcher with experience in industry and academia. She is passionate about science communication and education and is excited to contribute to the Plantae Fellows Program by creating accessible resources that connect diverse audiences with plant science.



Trevor Melusen

Trevor is currently a researcher at Plasmidsaurus, where he focuses on making Next-Generation Sequencing faster and more affordable for all researchers. He is eager to bring his experience in scaling cutting-edge sequencing tools to the plant science community, building on his previous research into plant-bacterial interactions in the rhizosphere. He believes community outreach is a necessity and is excited to connect with local communities to share knowledge. X: @trevor_melusen



Iris Mollhoff

Iris is a recent graduate of the Stanford Biology PhD program. She is an avid educator, gardener, and enjoys diving into new artistic hobbies. Iris is fascinated by plant secondary metabolites and is eager to learn more about how they function on a mechanistic level in plant growth and defense processes.



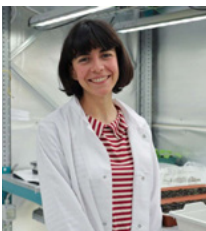
Shakunthala Natarajan

Shakunthala is a second-year PhD student at the Institute for Cellular and Molecular Botany, University of Bonn. Her research revolves around investigating plant gene duplications using comparative genomics and transcriptomics. She develops computational tools to explore the world of plants. Outside the lab she wears the hats of a science communicator and a musician. X: @Shak_Nat | Bluesky: @shakunthalan.bsky.social



Ruth Nichols

Ruth is a first year Plant Biology graduate student at Cornell University. In the Julkowska Lab at the Boyce Thompson Institute, she is interested in studying the Pareto front optimality of root system architectures for water transport under abiotic stress, namely microgravity and outer space conditions. She enjoys reading sci-fi, watching scary movies, camping, drawing, and drinking too much coffee.



Emma Olmi

Emma is a PhD student at the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Pisa. Passionate about plant science and molecular biology, she investigates how plants recover from submergence and cope with a combination of biotic and abiotic stresses. Outside the lab, Emma enjoys hiking, knitting cozy sweaters and singing. Bluesky: @olmiemma.bsky.social



Sonal Sachdev

Sonal is a Postdoc at the Department of Biology, NYU. She completed her Ph.D. early this year and started her postdoc journey in the USA. During her Graduate research, she studied the fascinating mechanism underlying Pollen development and unveiled a crucial involvement of Chromatin remodelers in orchestrating plant hormone Jasmonic acid and its role in the development of the male gametophyte. Currently, she is exploring the fascinating world of DNA-Protein interactions governing the developmental and stress response pathways in Arabidopsis. She is also an ASPB ambassador, an SEB mentor, and a PlantPosdocs Leadership Team member. She is looking forward to working with the amazing Plantae Fellow cohort. She thoroughly enjoy reading fiction and gardening during her time away from the lab. X: @sci3ntyst | Bluesky: @sci3ntyst.bsky.social



Charlay Wood

Charlay is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, originally from the UK. Her research is a blend of plant biochemistry and synthetic biology, where she engineers crops to both capture more atmospheric carbon and transform it into high-value aromatic compounds. She's also leading efforts to commercialize a red-pigmented soybean as a sustainable alternative to synthetic food dyes. Beyond the lab, she teaches Argentine Tango, is obsessed with learning new languages and insists football should never be called soccer! X: @Charlaywood 🌱

Applications for the 2027 cohort of Plantae Fellows open this summer!

Watch Plantae.org and follow ASPB on social media for announcements!

When scientists speak together, policymakers listen.

By joining the efforts of ASPB's Science Policy Committee, you'll help shape policies that fund discovery, sustain research careers, and strengthen our scientific future.

Add your voice to a growing movement for plant science with the advocacy tools on the ASPB website:



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REVIEW talking points for meetings with your members of Congress

EXPLORE key US government resources to inform your communication

Get started today!
» aspb.org/advocacy

Recognizing ASPB Pioneer Members

Pioneer Members of ASPB provided the education and research training for many members of our community, and in some cases the leadership of the Society and its journals. Their recognition as a Pioneer comes from former graduate students, postdocs, colleagues, family members, and friends who collectively contributed \$5,000 or more to honor them.

Learn more about
ASPB Pioneers!



Daniel Bush
Judy Callis
Nicholas Carpita
Alice Cheung
Mary-Dell Chilton
Joanne Chory
Maarten Chrispeels
Nam-Hai Chua
Robert Cleland
Mary Clutter
Jerry Cohen
Marc Alan Cohn
Eric Conn
Gloria Coruzzi
Daniel Cosgrove
Jeff Dangl
(and Sarah Grant)
John Davidson
Katayoon Dehesh
Dean DellaPenna
Debbie Delmer
Machi Dilworth
Richard Dixon
Xinnian Dong
Hugo Dooner
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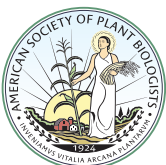


TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!

The ASPB News strives to meet members' needs and interests. To ensure the publication continues to evolve along with ASPB members, please take just a few minutes to answer five questions about the ASPB News. We'll use the information to help shape future issues and the overall publication going forward.



Take the survey at qrc0.de/bdFEHu



ASPB staff are dedicated to serving our members.
We welcome your questions and feedback.

For quick response, email us at info@aspb.org.

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