



Plant & Food Research Summer Student Programme

Summer student programme: a symbiotic relationship between companies and university students.

By Mario Alayon and Eileen Han

All university students need to face the reality of a work environment. Subjects at university provide the basic fundamentals and also develop specific skills. For example, for engineering or technology students the mathematics, physics and chemistry subjects offer them the tools to develop creative, analytical and practical skills.

The New Zealand Institute for Plant & Food Research Limited (PFR) opens its doors each year to receive summer students and give them the opportunity to experience the applied research environment. During the development of the projects, the students are able to show their aptitude and knowledge by managing project tasks. While the students have the opportunity to work in the field, their supervisors gain fresh ideas and are introduced to new tools to manage their work challenges. This mutual learning process is a symbiotic relationship between the summer students and companies.

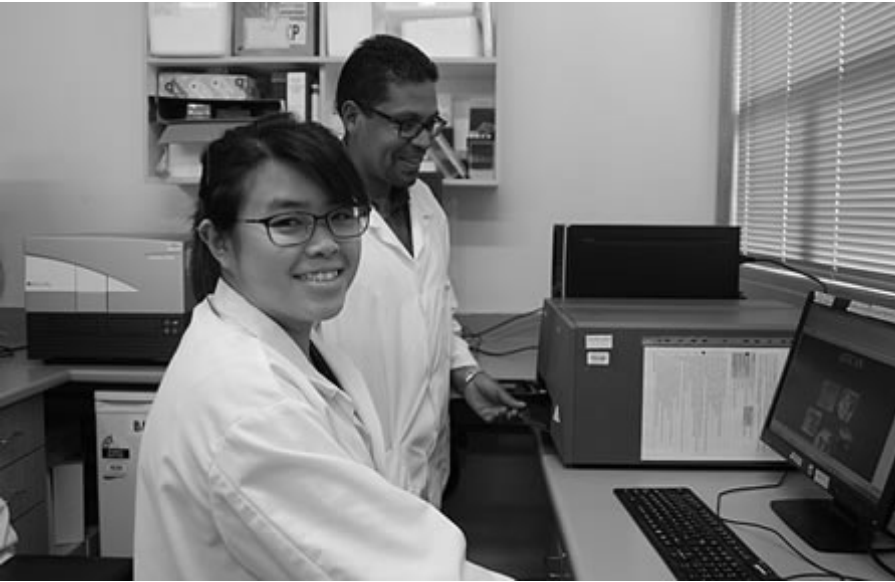


Eileen Han, summer student 2016/2017 in the Food Solutions Team of PFR, relates her experience:

“As part of a government supported programme run by the Bioresource Processing Alliance (BPA) that aims to help NZ biological-based manufacturing businesses harness the hidden value in the biological materials they process, I was awarded an internship scholarship for a summer project at Plant and Food Research (PFR) where I was part of the Food Solutions team.

I had completed a Massey Food Technology degree when I worked at PFR in the summer of 2016/2017. I am not a stranger to PFR as I had completed my Fourth Year Project with Mario Alayon, Development Engineer from the Food Solutions team in PFR. My Fourth Year Project involved working with by-products from a tuber processing plant. The science knowledge and techniques used in the project sparked my interest in working with by-products. Thus, I applied for the summer project with PFR which involves separating polyphenols from plant-based materials by using biopolymers.

My summer project involved understanding food chemistry, identifying qualitative and quantitative methods for detection of particular chemical components in the material. This helped me to relate food science and biochemistry knowledge which I gained during my degree to my work. The experience gave me an opportunity to have a feel of research work as well as being a team player in a dynamic team. It helped me to gain exposure in many fundamental areas in research work and allowed me to apply critical thinking skills I gained over the years.”



Eileen and Mario

Eileen was part of the Summer Student Programme at PFR 2016/2017. Through this programme she met other summer students from various PFR sites and people from different science fields. As part of the programme the summer students attended a leadership conference in Auckland and visited the main PFR, Mount Albert site. Here they received additional tutorials on CV writing and interview skills.

Eileen is grateful for the opportunity offered by the BPA and PFR. She is thankful that the relationship built with PFR and herself led to her summer work and postgraduate work opportunities. She recommends the PFR Summer Student Programme to future food technology students as it helped broaden her views on food science and sparked her passion for research work.

On a non-technical note from her, she added: "The team members in PFR are very welcoming and helpful which makes the experience an even more enriching one!"

For more information about the BPA, refer:
www.bioresourceprocessing.co.nz



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