

Biographies



Elena Bidash

Elena did a BA in Natural Sciences at the University of Cambridge and then worked as a research technician in the Circadian Signal Transduction group at the Department of Plant Sciences. Elena is now a PhD student in Natasha Yelina's group working on manipulating meiotic recombination for crop breeding with a focus on developing virus-induced gene silencing and editing tools in soybean, peas and other legumes. Elena was drawn to this project as she is interested in research which explores how the knowledge of fundamental plant biology can be translated to tackle real life problems. The project is part-funded by AFCP.

Dr. Steve Rawsthorne

Steve graduated from the University of Manchester in 1978 (BSc Biochemistry) and then the University of Reading (PhD) working on the physiology and biochemistry of symbiotic nitrogen fixation. He used this foundation of understanding how biochemistry determines physiology to go on to investigate novel mechanisms underpinning photosynthetic evolution, and fatty acid synthesis in oilseeds. In 2005 he became the Science Operations Manager at JIC overseeing the development of science facilities and the interaction with the administrative and technical support departments. Steve retired from JIC in 2015 and a year later joined The Morley Agricultural Foundation (TMAF), becoming a Director in 2017. By 2019 Steve initiated the TMAF-funded Morley PhD Studentship programme, which was followed by appointment to Studentship Advisor for AgriFood Charities Partnership in 2022.



Dr. Jim Stevens

Jim has had a very varied career. After leaving university in the mid-1990s he was a bike messenger for a while before starting his first proper career in the wine trade. Back then, there was no UK wine production to speak of, so he worked in retail & wholesale sales, and latterly, wine journalism. An abrupt switch in 2000 saw him work in financial services in the City, where he eventually became a fund manager. Tiring of the merry-go-round of investment, in 2014 he studied for a PhD in plant science at the University of Essex. He spent time there as a postdoc and lecturer working on IoT, sensors and automation in horticulture. Re-entering the commercial world, he then worked for Vertical Future, a vertical farming engineering firm. In 2024 he left to become a senior consultant for Innophyte working on environmental control of CEA systems, in sensors & automation, and in creating plant growth models based on physics, biology and finance principles.

Dr. Natasha Yelina

Natasha received her BA, MSc and PhD working on RNA silencing in plant-virus interactions. Over the following years, she received Royal Society/NATO, EMBO and Broodbank Postdoctoral Fellowships to join Prof Sir David Baulcombe's and Prof Ian Henderson's labs in the Sainsbury Laboratory in Norwich and Department of Plant Sciences in Cambridge, respectively, to pursue her interests in RNA silencing, epigenetics and plant meiosis. More recently, she contributed to research in Prof Julian Hibberd's lab at the Department of Plant Sciences in Cambridge where she used *Marchantia polymorpha* to identify ancestral and non-ancestral pathways regulating chloroplast biogenesis and greening. She is now head of Crop Breeding Technologies Group at the Crop Science Centre where her overarching aim is to discover novel approaches to control meiotic recombination and, building on this fundamental knowledge, develop step-changing technologies to accelerate crop breeding.

