

FINDING NEW RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES IN PLANT BIOLOGY

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As biologists we have the greatest dream of finding a position as a researcher. If this is hard under normal conditions it certainly became challenging when the COVID-19 pandemic began. The future of the next generation of scientists was uncertain and complicated at that moment because their training was severely affected specially for those undergraduate and Ms. students which only have between one and 3 years to get research experience. PhD. students were also affected, particularly those who were ready to both, present their dissertation and to contact prospective mentors for a postdoctoral position. It is very difficult to compile all the experiences of the students at any of the levels described, but the only certainty at the time was finding a way to continue the dream of becoming a researcher. I would like to share my story with you! One day around 2019 the spark that fueled my desire to be a researcher went out. Obviously, everything around me had almost collapsed, and I tried to find a job, but I couldn't find anything. Then, one day in 2020 after visiting cornfields a farmer invited me to help him plant corn, and although I had already worked with corn in the lab, things were so different and not so easy in field conditions. Everything I knew about maize completely changed and from the first day a whole new world opened up for me. Ideas began to sprout in my mind, and after a few weeks they were starting to take shape as research projects (at least in my mind). For the first time in almost two years I smiled again, felt happy, and boom! my spark shone once more. From there, I continued helping with planting, and after two years the local farmers encouraged me and gave me the right to design and conduct field experiments using their resources. Without realizing it, I was complementing the skills I had acquired in the lab with new skills learned in the field, and unintentionally, over time, I finally became a researcher who went from being a lab mouse to a field one. But there was still one problem that remained unsolved: although I already was a researcher they didn't pay me and the farmer told me "you have to find a job related to your studies" and then asked me: "Haven't you thought about being a professor?" I smiled and said OMG! I really want to be a professor. So I decided to look for a job as a professor, and after six months I finally got some calls for interviews. I went to these interviews and while I was there the academic coordinator told me "I like you, I see in your eyes the spark that is needed for this job, welcome" and just like a mouse that comes from outside the lab and knows it has to leave, I took off my lab coat, gathered my belongings, looked fondly back at the lab, said thank you, I put on my straw hat and boots, and I began my journey towards new adventures in the field at the same time I am spending my time teaching in the classroom.

At the beginning of this journey I didn't know the exact way to get my research position (or its equivalent) or even how to approach but don't worry it also doesn't seem easy for everybody including my student who is also trying to find a path to converge in this route. But what we consider to be essential is the observation of the plants that are present in nature, and if you pay enough attention some of their mysteries and tricks will be revealed to you. Please make a wand from a little branch and become a kind magician in the form of a plant scientist.