

Spotlight on Andrea Bianchini

AACC International members each have their own story, and we want to highlight all of their amazing accomplishments. "Spotlights" is a series of individual and institutional member interviews capturing the unique stories of our many volunteers and their journeys with AACCI.



Andrea Bianchini
University of Nebraska
Member for 10 years

Q: What is your current position and what type of work do you do?

A: I am an associate professor in the Department of Food Science and Technology at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln. Currently I divide my time among teaching, research, and extension. I really enjoy teaching face-to-face and distance courses, and my position at UNL has allowed me to interact in these two ways with undergraduate and graduate students, as well as industry pro-

professionals who are seeking technical training or furthering their education. On the research side, I have built my career around applied research questions. This has allowed for integration between my research efforts and my extension program. Under this model, the research output generated can be disseminated by the extension activities, while the extension activities provide feedback and input from industry on research needs.

Q: When and how did you first decide you wanted to work in cereal grain science?

A: Very early in my academic career, while still working on my master's degree, I was interested in bringing together my training in food engineering and microbiology to improve grain quality and safety. Back then I was interested in the effects of different grain-handling practices on the quality and safety of paddy rice.

Q: When did you join AACCI and why?

A: I joined AACCI in 2007 at the suggestion of my Ph.D. advisor, Dr. Lloyd Bullerman. Throughout his career, he saw the benefits of being an AACCI member and strongly supported my participation in meetings and activities related to AACCI. Later on, Dr. Rolando Flores was also influential in my involvement with the association. Since then I have been very active in any way I can.

Q: Why did you decide to volunteer with AACCI? How did you get involved and what has been most rewarding about this experience?

A: The invitation to participate as a committee member came almost as a surprise. Early in 2010 I was a member of the association, but not very active. The invitation certainly made me take that first step and join two technical committees— Check Sample and the Food Safety and Microbiology Technical Committee. My involvement at first grew slowly, because at the beginning I was not familiar with the different committees' charges and functions. There was definitely a learning period before I knew how I could best contribute to those committees. However, since then, I have tried to help as much

as possible with the different initiatives set forth by those committees, especially those related to the Food Safety and Microbiology Committee, on which I am currently serving as chair.

The most rewarding aspect of this experience has been the opportunities to network with the industry. This has allowed me to help connect the resources and research findings available in the academic environment with the stakeholders who can make the best use of them, for the benefit of both the industry and consumers. I also think that personally it has helped to focus my research and extension activities on what is needed and relevant, allowing for the greatest potential impact. On many levels, it is definitely a win-win situation.

Q: In what ways does your work create innovation in cereal science and the cereal grain industry?

A: The work I did with postharvest storage for paddy rice during my master's program was just the beginning of a true interest in grains and cereals. Since then my interest in grain quality and safety has deepened, always with the idea of bridging research findings with industrial applications. Over the years I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to work directly with the food industry, at production and processing levels. It has been quite exciting to see innovative strategies to improve grain and grain-based product safety, that were either developed or tested by our research group, be implemented at the commercial level. In my current position at UNL I am committed to maintaining this close relationship with the grain industry to ensure that my research program is relevant and meets the needs of the industry.

Q: This issue of CFW explores new ways in which organizations are collaborating to drive innovation (e.g., industry-academic partnerships, interdepartmental research programs). Have you had any experience with these types of collaborative programs and how do they enable you to be more innovative?

A: Most of my interactions with other professionals who are also members of this association came about either because we serve on the same committees or because they may have attended a poster session or symposium sponsored by AACCI in which I also participated. From those interactions, several industry-academic partnerships have been started to address specific industry issues or concerns. One great example is a group of experts who came together in support of an international discussion around the establishment of limits for deoxynivalenol, a mycotoxin, in nonprocessed grain. The efforts of this group were communicated to all stakeholders in the form of a scientific publication in CFW in early 2015, "DON Occurrence in Grains: A North American Perspective." It was great to see professionals from universities, the private sector,

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and commodities groups all come together to evaluate the issue and potential impact of what at the time was a proposed set of new international guidelines.

I believe that all of these opportunities that AACCI creates for professional interaction, throughout the year and at the annual meeting, provide opportunities to forge collaborations that can reach international levels for the benefit of the grain industry and consumers.

Q: What's next for you?

A: I am very proud of the grain safety program that I have helped to develop at UNL, so I think for us the next steps would be to further establish this research program as a national and international reference and to expand it to train even more students in this area. Contributions from professionals with expertise in the safety of grains and grain-based foods will only become more essential as we face the challenges associated with feeding an increasing population, managing limited natural resources, and evolving environmental challenges. I believe I can contribute in many ways as we face these challenges, from continuing to ask relevant research questions, training the next generations of food scientists, and continuing to support the grain industry in its efforts to provide food that is safe and of high quality to consumers.