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Giract Award – Promoting Flavour Research amongst PhD Students in Europe
Dr. V. Krishnakumar and Prof. Andy Taylor

Many of the major, global players in flavour and flavour ingredient production are located in Europe where they make a significant contribution to national economies through their production and R&D activities. Flavour and flavour ingredient production, and flavour R&D, also involve many smaller companies who contribute specific expertise and products to the larger companies. There are also many large and small European companies who use flavor technology to develop their own unique food and beverage products. The economic value of these activities to Europe is difficult to estimate accurately but there is a very strong socioeconomic case for retaining and supporting these activities within Europe.

Given the global nature of businesses, there is always pressure to consider relocating to alternative sites in the USA or the Far East for marketing or financial advantage. In addition, fast-developing economies such as China and India are investing huge sums in basic R&D activities in order to gain economic advantage over the West. Given their low cost-base, these economies are currently trying to woo basic research away from the West.

One factor keeping the companies in Europe is the availability of well-trained personnel and a wide variety of Universities and Research Institutes that can supply research facilities and specialist advice and consultancy to the flavor companies. These Universities and Institutes are already well-connected in Europe through various informal mechanisms (eg. COST actions, triennial flavour science meetings such as the Weurman and Wartburg). In order to compete effectively in flavor R&D against established countries such as the US and Japan, together with fast-rising giants such as China and India, it was felt that Europe should show a strong, unified and synergistic face in the future.

This was translated into a full-fledged programme to encourage students to study flavour-related topics at PhD level, which is sponsored by Biorigin, DSM Food Specialties, Givaudan, International Flavours & Fragrances (IFF), Kerry, Lesaffre International, Mitsubishi Corporation Life Sciences (MCLS) Europe and Nestlé. The programme is now in its 8th edition and operates at three levels:

- To publicise the attractions of flavor research and how study at the PhD level can lead to careers in industry
- To encourage students to study a flavour-related PhD topic, six bursaries of 3000 euros are offered each year to first year PhD students
- For students completing their theses, a single 5000 euro prize is offered for the best thesis and the winner is also invited to attend the Annual Savory Flavor Conference as a platform for the winning student(s) to present his/her work to ‘potential employers’

GIRACT provides the administration to run the programme, which has received appreciation from both students and professors across Europe.

The awards are acknowledged by postings on the Institutions webpages as well as through social media, which extends the awareness of the programme to a wider audience.

In this 8th edition, the programme attracted eleven applications for each of the 2017/18 best PhD thesis and 1st year bursary awards from candidates studying in 20 different universities across Europe. Notable fact is that all eleven candidates for the best thesis were women, showing the strong presence of women in flavour science. This year, we have approached more than 255 universities across the whole of Europe to identify and encourage applicants. The programme has achieved its aim of increasing interest in flavor research, with many professors submitting candidates every year for both the first and final year awards. The first year awards are also meant to encourage Master’s students to take up flavour science for their PhD research. The final year awards serve to reward the hard work and diligence of the doctoral candidates.
Feedback from the applicants has been very positive; successful candidates at the Best Thesis and Bursary levels see the awards as recognition of the high quality of their research projects, which reflects well on the research institutions, the supervisors and the students. The awards are acknowledged by postings on the Institutions webpages as well as through social media, which extends the awareness of the programme to a wider audience.

The 2017/18 Best thesis award in flavor research honoured Dr. Margaux Cameleyre of Institute of Grape and Wine Sciences, University of Bordeaux (supervisor Professor Jean Christophe Barbe) for her work entitled “Study of red wines fruity aromatic expression. Importance of pre-sensorial level in perceptive interactions”. Margaux will have the opportunity to present her work to the Sponsor companies of the GIRACT award as well as have the chance to attend the Savoury Flavour meeting in Geneva. She will be formally awarded her prize by Dr. Krishnakumar, Managing Director of Giract.

The adjudication panel summarised Margaux’s research as follows, “The focus was on a wine system, where a fruity attribute had been identified and its chemical composition determined. It was found that adding some other aromas caused a significant change in the fruity attribute. Using the Phase Ratio Variation (PRV) method, Margaux showed that the added aromas changed the partition coefficients of the existing fruity compounds and therefore the aroma profile that was present in the headspace above the wine. This work clearly shows that interactions take place at the physicochemical level and PRV is a good way to measure this effect. This work provides a potential mechanism for aroma-aroma interactions and a method to measure it.”

The winners of the first year bursary for the eighth edition are: Christine Belloir (Institut National de la Recherche Agronomique (INRA), France), Paulina Morquecho Campos (Wageningen University and Research, The Netherlands), Holly Clarke (Teagasc Food Research Centre, Ireland), Ilze Laukaleja (Latvia University of Agriculture, Latvia), Dominika Olszak (Poznan University of Life Sciences, Poland) and Benedikt Slavik (Henriette Schmidt-Burkhardt Lehrstuhl für Lebensmittelchemie, Friedrich-Alexander-Universität, Germany).

One of the 8th edition bursary winner, Ms. Dominika Olszak from Poznan University of Life Sciences, Poland has mentioned that she is very glad and awarding her bursary was a good surprise. She has also mentioned that herself and the University have more opportunities to expand their knowledge and conduct scientific research because of the scholarship. She has added that “I am very proud that the project my supervisor (Małgorzata Majcher) and I developed is interesting and developmental in the opinion of the adjudicating panel. I promise that this bursary money will be used rationally.”

Another excited bursary winner, Ms. Christine Belloir from INRA AgroSup Dijon, France has communicated that, “I want to thank you a lot for having retain my PhD project this year. I am going to take advantage of this budget to buy different consumables for my experiments and to take part in different meetings this year. Thanks for making this possible!

Students pursuing/interested in joining PhD in flavour studies in European universities may find more information about the programme in the Giract page, www.giract.com.

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