

Luke Bell**Doctoral Researcher in Food & Nutritional Science at the University of Reading**

I attended the 29th International Horticultural Congress (IHC) in Brisbane, Australia to present my most recent research findings. My work relates to the phytochemical content of rocket (or rucola) salad, and in particular, that of underutilised cultivars and varieties. The main aim of my research is to enhance the chemical and quality traits of rocket through plant breeding. This includes improved sensory attributes, which is one of the main problems with current varieties on the market.



I gave two presentations at the Congress, a digital poster and a fifteen-minute talk. The digital poster was an interesting experience, and not something I had ever tried before. It consisted of a three-minute summary of the work, to a small group of people, in front of a large touch-screen television. I was only allowed five slides, making it even more difficult to condense my findings. The poster summarised my work on taste perceptions of different rocket cultivars, and I received an enthusiastic response and some interesting questions. My oral presentation was given to a small audience as part of the underutilised genetic resources in plant breeding section of the conference.

I presented an analysis of glucosinolate and flavonol compounds found in rocket; both of which are known to have beneficial human health effects. I highlighted how such information could be useful for plant breeders in creating nutritively enhanced varieties. This same presentation was also given at a separate visit to Southern Cross University in New South Wales where I received an equally enthusiastic response.

Visiting this conference and Southern Cross was an excellent opportunity to develop my presentation skills. I have given many presentations in the past, but never at a major international gathering such as this. The environment was very different to what I have been used to, but it was refreshing to present my work to people who may not know anything about my research area. The chance to answer questions from an audience with little background knowledge to my crop of interest was something I enjoyed, and made me think about things from a different perspective.

I applied to the Society of Biology for a travel grant because I knew what an excellent opportunity it would be to present my work to an international audience. I knew I would be able to create helpful contacts with people and groups in related areas of research. Throughout the conference week I met several people who were very interested in my work and had learned something from my findings. A few people approached me to talk about particular problems they had been having in their own studies, and asked for my advice. This was both surprising and encouraging for me to know that people valued what I had to say. Similarly, I knew that going to an international conference would be an excellent learning opportunity for me as well, from a technical point of view. I came back with lots of fresh ideas for new experiments and how I can improve my own methods.

I would encourage other researchers to apply for travel grants from the Society of Biology, as it was an enormous help to me both financially and professionally. Going to conferences is a great way to make new contacts and get to know the other people in your field, as well as putting your own research and opinions out there.