**National Association for Plant Breeding**
# EARLY CAREER SCIENTIST AWARD 2024



**JACQUELINE BENSON McROBERTS**
**Bayer Crop Science**
**Chesterfield MO**

The 2024 recipient of the National Association for Plant Breeding Early Career Scientist Award is Jacqueline (Jaci) Benson McRoberts, Bayer Crop Science, Chesterfield MO. The Early Career Scientist Award recognizes an individual pursuing a career in the plant breeding field and received their PhD in the past ten years. Awardees have established strong research foundations, interact with multidisciplinary teams, demonstrate leadership, and participate actively in relevant professional societies.

As one colleague stated: "In addition to being an unstoppable force as a researcher, manager, mentor and teacher, Jaci is a warm, fun and generous person of impeccable character. With her outstanding combination of personal and professional merits, she is clearly an ideal choice for the NAPB Early Career Scientist Award."

Benson McRoberts currently serves as Head of Data Stewardship and Digital Enablement on the Data Science and Engineering Capability Center in Vegetable R&D. She leads the team to build Information Technology strategy and design, launch and support the organization's digital workflows, providing solutions for predictive breeding analytics, trialing, nursery and lab operations with a secure data foundation enabling improved decision-making and efficiency. Thus, growers and consumers benefit from improved vegetable varieties faster.

Another colleague observes: "Jaci has many 'firsts' in her young career at Bayer Crop Science: Phase advancing the first gene editing project with commercial intent, developing the first prescriptive roadmaps for controlled environment in Plant Biotechnology, and delivering the first Global Shipping Solution to Vegetable Seeds R&D. Her desire for a meaningful impact on global food security through plant breeding manifests in her ability to see possibilities and

cultivate trust to lead across functions, crops, and world regions to deliver seed and trait technologies to farmers."

Benson McRoberts started her career as a Trait Integration Breeder, where she accelerated the product development pipeline by designing the operations research methodology to select the best trait donors for integration into the breeding germplasm and automating inventory selection for nursery seed production though data stewardship. Later, as both Trait Integration Breeding Hybrid Lead and Varietal Lead, she drove the transformation of trait conversion centers to enable prescriptive planting and fully traited testing, which enabled earlier characterization of products and delivered better product information to farmers. In these roles, she fostered relationships and drove meaningful metrics and operational excellence that ensured commercial teams received the best germplasm for farmers.

As the Crop Efficiency Genome Editing Platform Lead, Benson McRoberts led a cross-functional team to phase advance the first gene-editing project with commercial intent. She also developed strategic plans for targeted external collaborations, including Pairwise, a food start-up company leveraging gene-editing capabilities to cultivate fruits and vegetables.

Benson McRoberts strives to have meaningful impact on global food security through plant breeding, analytics and digital enablement. She thrives in roles that allow her to see new possibilities, collaborate, build strategy and implement with results-orientation. As a relator with a positive, strategic mindset and servant leadership style, she has engaged deeply across functions for over 10 years at Bayer Crop Science.

Another colleague comments: "Jaci is the type of leader and scientist that not only makes me excited to come to work every day, but she is also someone that makes me and others want to be better. I cannot capture in words the energy she brings to her work and how this energy excites those around her and makes people think that almost anything is scientifically possible."

With a passion for developing others, Benson McRoberts has served on the Women in Science Exchange and the business resource group for African and African Americans national leadership teams. She planned and executed development opportunities for the two communities, including panels, excursions, annual and multi-business resource group events to help colleagues build business acumen and people networks.  As a Cornell University Plant Breeding and Genetics alumnus, Jaci also mentors plant science graduate students in the Bayer4U program. During family time, Jaci plays, gardens and hikes with her husband and two lovely girls, Reigha (5) and Alora (1).

In conclusion, as another colleague notes: "Jaci is an exemplary example of an early career scientist. She creates and executes new ideas to completion, challenges status quo, transforms current state workflows, and advocates for those around her through various avenues. I am proud to work alongside Jaci and feel very fortunate to be a part of her journey."

Dr. Jacqueline Benson McRoberts, Bayer Crop Science, the 2024 recipient of the Early Career Scientist Award of the National Association for Plant Breeding, phenotyping experimental materials in the greenhouse.