

What a Workshop for the 22nd Time!

We have just completed the 22nd International Workshop on Rapid Methods and Automation in Microbiology at Kansas State University with scientists from more than 15 countries and 20 States. It was a most intensive workshop. We spent 8 days, 12 hours per day, interacting with a large group of participants, industry representatives, professors, students, and guests from all over the world. In the mornings, we had lectures and, in the afternoons, we had laboratory experiments and demonstrations.

A few special lectures made this workshop unique in this series; which was started in 1980.

Dr. Cecile Lahellec from France gave a lecture on her life-long interactions with *Salmonella* research work. It was very moving to listen to a distinguished scientist describing how she began her research work on *Salmonella* in the 70's and how she developed different methods and procedures to isolate, detect, and identify this important foodborne pathogen starting from conventional methods and moved to advanced technologies and, finally, into risk assessment of *Salmonella* in foods. As she was presenting the intriguing story of her life, I thought it would be a great idea to have an outstanding scientist give a talk on a lifetime interaction with one important foodborne pathogen. For example, we can have a talk on "A lifetime with *Clostridium botulinum*" in one year, another year, "A lifetime with *Staphylococcus aureus*". One day I may invite myself to give a talk on "A lifetime with miniaturized microbiological techniques". That would be fun!

Due to the importance of prevention of bioterrorism in the USA and in the world, Dr. Stephen A. Morse of the CDC was invited to give a talk on "Rapid Methods and Bioterrorism Preparedness and Prevention". It was a fantastic talk. He gave a broad review of the issues related to bioterrorism and rapid detection of toxins and microbes related to bioterrorism and then went into specific instruments and procedures to detect organisms from air and water, etc. Did you know that now there are instruments which can complete a PCR detection procedure in only one hour? Most PCR procedures take several hours to complete. Some of the instruments mentioned in Dr. Morse's lecture were demonstrated and discussed in our workshop. The topic was very appropriate for our total program in rapid detection of microbes in the environment. We will have him back to give an update of the developments in protecting the public against bioterrorism.

Another exciting lecture was given by Mike Brodsky, past president of AOAC International, who discussed the need for rapid evaluation of new microbiological technologies by AOAC International. Everyone was interested in the topic because the standard collaborative study of a new system takes more than two years. Even the AOAC Performance Test of a new system takes about nine months or more.



MEMORIES OF THE 22ND WORKSHOP

Now with computer technology and the new push for rapid validation of new methods, the plan is to have a new system cleared in a matter of months instead of years. That was great news to everyone interested in developing new technologies and users waiting to apply new technologies in their laboratories.

We also had a Molecular Food Microbiology Day at the Kansas State University Veterinary College. There were six outstanding companies representing the newest and the best technologies in PCR and related technologies in the program. All the participants had a chance to see these new and sophisticated systems in operation. It was truly the largest concentration of PCR technologies in action in the same place at the same time. The experience was unparalleled.

Besides working very hard the participants were treated to delicious banquets, a Mongolian barbecue, a picnic, a swimming pool party, etc. so that they could relax a bit after work. We even took them to the world famous Konza Prairie Research Center where tall grass, natural habitats for unique flora and fauna are preserved and studied. The wonderful tour guide took us all over the huge natural compound in a caravan of cars, vans, and jeeps looking for the free ranging Bison herds. I never knew Kansas has up and down terrains and even some small canyons. We found a herd of Bison and stopped to enjoy the beauty of these huge and magnificent animals. One of the Bison was hand fed by humans from birth. She thought she was a human being and interacted warmly with our brave participants who walked up to her as if she were a domestic cow. It was quite a sight to see five or six people trying to encourage a 500 lb Bison to go back to the rest of the herd. Luckily, nobody was hurt. I was watching the action from the safety of my van.

It is hard to imagine that we have conducted this eight day workshop for 22 years in a row at Kansas State University. The 23rd workshop will be held from June 13 to June 20 in 2003. I encourage my dedicated team of hard working graduate students and research assistants to go on vacations and have some relaxation before the school year begins in August.

As for me, I will have to go to California to a very important committee meeting organized by the National Academy of Sciences to tackle the topic "Indicators for Waterborne Pathogens". It should be a very stimulating and challenging meeting. I am sure I will find time to relax in sunny California and may find some great Chinese and Japanese restaurants to catch up with my culinary adventures around the world.

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