

Ex-Challenge students now studying food science or technology at uni

2017 is the ninth year that NZIFST and CREST have run the NZIFST/CREST Student Product Development Challenge.

– By Jenny Dee.

We are in contact with many ex-Challenge students who are now studying food science or technology at university, and others who have graduated and are now working in our industry.

Mrinali Kumar participated in the Challenge in 2014, when she was in Year 11 at **Wellington High School**. Mrinali is now a first year student doing food technology at Massey Palmerston North.

Mrinali says: “I had very minimal knowledge regarding the expectations from the Challenge and the work that will be required. Unfortunately, I was amongst the uneducated populace that assumed that Food Technology has a more practical food making aspect. So, actually realising that I had to basically conduct science experiments constantly, and write huge reports was a surprise. Regardless of the huge workload and many team disagreements, I learnt heaps of new skills and enjoyed the processes involved. The CREST Challenge introduced me to a new industry, which I have decided to pursue as my career.

The first year components of the degree have been very standard engineering based, which has been difficult to work through. High school Food Technology gives the expectation of a more practical based degree, like the work involved for CREST Projects. However, this is more the case in the future years of the degree. A negative so far has been the constant assignments and weekly examinations. Skills such as time management, perseverance and coping with a lack of sleep definitely have come useful so far.

However, due to the skills learnt for CREST, I have personally found the project papers easier. I have found myself familiar to the foundation skills being introduced to class members for the first time. These include relevant terminology such as ‘brief’ and ‘specifications’ and what they entail.

I feel perseverance is quite important for this degree. Many times things don't work out as predicted, and with time constraints and deadlines, trying to find a solution becomes difficult. Perseverance becomes crucial at these times. Thankfully, the CREST Challenge, and my food technology teachers helped me develop this skill previously.

I definitely think the Challenge is a great way to familiarise students with food technology as a career, as it familiarises with aspects of Food Technology.”

Valencia Ngadi is also a first year food tech student, at Massey Albany. Valencia did the Challenge in 2015, when she was in Year 12 at **Carmel College**. She was awarded an Edna Waddell Scholarship in 2017.

Valencia says: “The Challenge confirmed that I really do want to be a food technologist in the food industry in the future because by working with a food technologist, I got to see firsthand a small portion of what they do and I loved it!

The Challenge has helped me at uni especially in the project paper we do, in terms of project management. At the start of each semester, we had to create a project plan which would help us manage our time wisely and make sure we complete tasks before the due date. CREST has helped me understand the importance of time management and making sure our team works well together to always communicate so that we finish on time.

I'm really enjoying my first year here at Massey because the lecturers are very approachable and friendly so it made the transition from high school to university easy. The papers I'm taking are with the engineers so you get to have a taste of both engineering and food/chemistry aspects of Food Technology before making a choice of Food Engineering or Product Development in third year.

I highly recommend this course because not only do you learn, you get to apply what you learn into solving real-life problems in the industry which is fun because you can get really creative!”

Georgia Wannan is also a **Carmel College** alumna in first year food tech at Albany. Georgia participated in the Challenge in 2014, and reports this was a huge contributing factor in choosing to study Food Technology at Massey.

“Although I am not a big fan of the subjects I take, it excites me knowing that in the end, I will become a food technologist. The challenge has definitely contributed important skills, which reflect largely on my group project paper, working together as a team to develop a product/system which fits a brief for purpose, where we have judging/presentation day at the end of every semester. The degree definitely pushes your limits, but so worth it!”

Eden Liddell is another ex-Challenger from **Carmel College** doing food tech at Massey Albany; she's in third year.

Eden says: “In 2013 I was lucky enough to participate in the Silver CREST Challenge representing Carmel College. I was in a group of 3 and our mentor was Fiona Greig from Beef Lamb New Zealand. Our brief was to develop a readymade meal for the target market of our choice which we chose to be toddlers aged 2-4 years old. This was an exciting project as we developed a product from scratch, with the help and guidance of our mentor, throughout the year and then presented our readymade meal to the judges at the end of the year.

By working with a mentor it allowed us as a group to not feel so unsure and alone in the development of the product, as it was a completely new process to us, and it truly helped us to understand key aspects of the food industry as a whole.

I am currently studying Food Technology majoring in Food Product Development at Massey University in Albany in my third year and I have never been happier. This degree is challenging, as science and mathematics are the basis of the degree for the first few years, then the exciting bit of developing and trialling food products comes after.

This is done individually and in a group situation but is very similar to the CREST competition, with the target market and product category defined in the brief and then research done in market, consumer and technical categories. The CREST Challenge gave me an understanding of what it was like to develop a product for a particular market and in a sense how it is done in the food industry today. This competition helped make me realise my passion in life and where I wanted to head career wise after school.”

Chelsea Whiteman is also in third year at Albany, majoring in Product Development. She did the Challenge in 2013, when at **Botany Downs Secondary College**.

Chelsea reports: “After completing the CREST competition in 2013, it confirmed for me that Food Technology was the career I wanted to pursue after graduation. The Challenge helped me learn how to work in a team in a food development scenario, and in my degree we have team projects every semester for three years and a year-long one in our final year, so it is a very valuable skill!”

The Challenge also helped me with problem solving and encouraged creativity (both the poster and the product) which are required for my degree.

At uni my favourite courses are nutrition and the project papers, as they give us a taste of what to expect when working for a company after graduation.

The Food Technology degree at Massey requires 300 hours of practical work experience to be completed during summer over the four years of study. I was fortunate enough to land a Quality Assistant job at Delmaine in my first year and then a Quality Technician job at Hellers Ltd for my second year. I am still at Hellers Ltd currently doing some part time work and am loving it so far.

My advice for students that really enjoyed the CREST competition is to give Food Technology a go, as it combines the best of science and food into one degree. Not to purposely endorse Massey, BUT if the idea of project work is what students like then Food Technology is the way to go as the Food Science degrees often do not include practical/project work and are mostly theory based.

One last thing, that Gay Watson from Futureintech told me, is that ‘as long as the world keeps eating,

there will always be jobs for Food Technologists”.

Raquel Lopez-Lozano is also in third year, at Massey Palmerston North. Raquel did the Challenge in 2014, when she was in Year 13 at **Palmerston North Girls High**.

“This Challenge really was a taste of what was to come. I learnt how to plan, deal with stress, work effectively in a team and work hard! This Challenge also showed me how much I enjoy this course of study and I am very happy that I took up this Challenge.

Throughout my time at Massey I had to learn how to present in front of audiences, how important planning is, learn on the move and most of all, how to enjoy it. I enjoy all my courses at Massey. They are all a very good challenge! We all struggle sometimes, but the whole year group has become quite close so we all help each other out.

In the 2016/2017 summer holidays I won a scholarship from AGMARDT to do a project for Federated Farmers of New Zealand about the goat industry in New Zealand. I visited farmers and food processors throughout the summer to write this report. I then presented this report at the New Zealand Society of Animal Production in June 2017. The training I had received in class really helped me to do a good job with this project and I hope to do many more like this!

Currently, I am on a semester exchange at Purdue University in Indiana, USA. This will be a good opportunity for me to see how food technology is done in other parts of the world and to learn in a different way.

Next year will be my last year of undergraduate study, and I am looking forward to it! I want to carry on learning and improving my practical and technical skills. Any budding students who are interested in studying food technology, chemical engineering and engineering should work hard, stay focused and above all, love what they do!”

Another ex-Challenger from **Carmel College**, **Maria Simpson**, completed a BApSc (Consumer Food Science) at Otago in 2016, and is now working at Pandoro Panetteira in Auckland. As a Food Safety Officer with the QA/Food Safety Team, she ensures that the ingredients used, and the final products, are of the highest quality.

Maria says: “There are two components to my job, food safety and quality, which are highly interrelated. I am enjoying taking my theoretical university knowledge into a practical workplace environment. The company has been wonderful in providing me with further opportunities to build on my skills. The opportunity to work with such a professional team, has been brilliant!”

We were delighted to have four ex-Challengers involved in the judging this year: Neala Hart, Hannah Hayes and Hayley Browne were judges. All now have food tech degrees from Massey, and are working in the food industry. Mrinali Kumar was one of the timekeepers in Palmerston North.

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