

Conference Report

SCE Young Scientist Event 2022

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On May 3rd, 2022, a group of about 30 young environmental scientists gathered in Stein at the research and development center of Syngenta Crop Protection to learn about job opportunities in chemical and chemical-related private companies. The latest changes in COVID-related safety regulations made it possible to hold the event in person, a near first that was highly appreciated after a long period of

online meetings. The event was organized by the SCS Section ‘Chemistry and the Environment’ and Syngenta at its state-of-the-art research facility, which was deliberately chosen to facilitate this learning experience.

Edouard Godineau (Syngenta) welcomed the young scientists and opened the day with an introduction about Syngenta and its expertise in designing, discovering and optimizing novel and safe substances. He briefly introduced how their expertise in this field was targeted towards creating new innovative products.

The day started with a keynote from **Heike Laue** (Givaudan). She gave a very inspirational talk about reducing animal testing by using alternative *in vitro* assays to understand the environmental risks when designing a new fragrance. It became clear that a generation of scientists with a new mindset will be needed to tackle the various challenges we will face in the future (e.g. pollution, climate change, loss of biodiversity).



Panel discussion.

After a lively scientific discussion, **Leslie Fendt** (Roche), opened the panel discussion with a personal story on how her

career and her passion towards sustainability was evolving. The panel consisted of junior and senior industry representatives, who gave a good overview on their individual career paths. All of their unique and diverse experiences gave the audience a good sense of how it feels starting a career in a private company as a young scientist. The panelists, **Elizabeth Boergardts** (Bayer), **Ludovic Vieille-Petit** (DSM), **Elodie Brun** (Firmenich), **Lucie Lovelle** (Novartis) and **Steve Maund** (Syngenta), gave insights on what their respective companies are doing to operate a sustainable business. It became obvious they do a lot, such as: increase efficiency in operation, reduce the company’s environmental footprint (GHG reduction, pollution) and investigate the design of more sustainable/environmentally friendly products. Everyone encouraged reluctant prospective students to still consider joining the chemical industry as many changes come from within. The panel format and diversity of the speakers was greatly appreciated by the audience, which engaged in a lot of questions. Young scientists were especially curious about what type of profiles big companies were looking to hire in the near future. All panelists were unanimous in answering that they were looking for motivated polyvalent people who are not afraid to learn new skills and adapt.

Following a short lunch break, that gave speakers and young scientists a chance to network and talk, Syngenta offered a site tour to all participants. Researchers explained how they discover and optimize new lead compounds to increase agricultural efficiency, while reducing the environmental footprint of agrochemicals. Biological screening to select fungicidal and insecticidal molecules is as important as seed care, soil and resistance research and life cycle management of existing sales products. It was made evident through this visit that sustainability clearly plays an important role in the agrochemical sector. This brief glance into the daily operations happening at the Syngenta Crop Protection site allowed participants to see a different side of research.

The afternoon ended with several round table discussions that allowed participants to meet industry representatives at first hand and discuss with them environmental sustainability careers with detailed insights from their respective companies. The industry representatives covered a broad spectrum from big and mid-sized companies, contract research organizations (CRO), and start-ups: **Ludovic Vieille-Petit** (DSM) – industrial hygienist, **Georg Kreutzer** and **Heike Laue** (Givaudan) – regulatory aspects, **Nicola Tabertshofer** (Novartis) – HSE professional, **Edouard Godineau** (Syngenta) – R&D, **Christiaan Wjintjes** (IES) – contract research organization, **Stephan Fischer** (aQua-Tox-Solutions) – spin-off. Even one representative from a public health system was present to give insights in their sphere of duties (**Deyan Poffet**, Unisanté Lausanne). The small group setting of the round tables allowed young scientists to ask many in depth questions on different topics, such as what would help them when moving from academia to chemical industry.

Conclusion

The big take away message from this event and good news is that young scientists are needed. There is a distinct need for well-educated scientists who bring a new mindset and ideas, who are curious to discover and who are interested in constant learning.

The world is changing quickly and so are the skillsets required for jobs in the chemical industry.

The written feedback from the participants gathered after the event was unanimous. Everyone would recommend this event and all participants were very satisfied with the format. The panel discussion and the round tables were particularly appreciated. The main negative point was the lack of time to ask more questions, which speaks for the success of the event. The SCE organizing team (Kathrin Fenner, Claudio Screpanti, Heike Laue, Tara Forrest, Jutta Hellstern) is glad that the event was a success and that it helped demystify the industry for young environmental scientists interested in a job in private companies. SCE considers repeating such an event in the near future. Stay tuned and curious!

Received: May 23, 2022