

Getting to Know AACCI: Tom Jondiko

AACC International members each have their own story, and we want to highlight all of their amazing accomplishments—both in AACCI and in their careers. “Getting to Know AACCI” is a series of member interviews capturing the unique stories of our many volunteers and their journeys with AACCI.



Tom Jondiko
Solvaira Specialties
Member for 8 years

Q: What is your current position and what are you currently working on?

A: I work at Solvaira Specialties as an R&D food scientist. I am currently working on developing and managing highly innovative product formulations for food companies. My role involves leading product development plant trials at food processing facilities in several countries: in all 50 U.S. states, Spain, Belgium, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and

Chile. I provide technical troubleshooting services to customers, both on- and off-site. I support our purchasing, quality, and operations departments in implementing measures that ensure we provide consistent products and services to our customers. I develop and implement experimental designs for formulation testing and recipe validation of ingredients to meet FDA/USDA and EU food regulation guidelines. I recently actively participated in implementation of new food label regulations and non-PHO, organic, non-GMO, clean label, reduced carb, and gluten-free products from conceptualization to commercialization.

Q: When and why did you first decide you wanted to work in cereal grain science?

A: My interest in and passion to work with cereal grains was motivated by my late father (Prof. Jondiko) in 2000. He mentored me in implementing projects aimed at adding value to food industry by-products in Kenya. I performed physical, chemical, and microbiological treatments on industrial and agricultural crop residues for use in value-added animal feed formulations. While studying food science and technology as a student at Egerton University, I worked in a rice processing factory and a Coca-Cola factory and helped to collect preliminary research data for development of research proposals. This was the main driver that led me to apply for graduate school so I could one day be a principal investigator. Cereal grains such as corn, rice, sorghum, and wheat are staple foods in Kenya, and it was my belief that by becoming an expert in cereal grains I would be able to positively contribute to the provision of value-added food options for the human population. I graduated from Texas A&M University with M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in food science and technology. My research involved collaborative projects with plant geneticists and breeders to develop specialty grains that meet global food security and human health

needs, while responding to the challenges of climate change and water scarcity.

Q: When did you first join AACCI and why?

A: I joined AACC in 2008 as a master’s student at Texas A&M University studying food science and technology under Dr. Lloyd Rooney and Dr. Joseph Awika, who are internationally renowned cereal grain scientists. AACCI provided me with an opportunity to present my research work at annual meetings. As a student member I was privileged to be awarded a number of prestigious international graduate fellowships. I wanted to interact with a community of cereal grain scientists and food company representatives who always showed interest in listening to my poster and oral presentations. I wanted to interact with and broaden my food industry networks with potential employers.

Q: Why did you decide to volunteer with AACCI, and what committees/boards are you currently serving on?

A: My zeal to play a positive role in the growth and expansion of AACCI led me to volunteer in various AACCI divisions, including the Carbohydrate and Processing & Engineering Divisions and the Student Association. I am currently a member of the AACCI Professional Development Panel.

Q: What have been the most exciting moments of your career or membership experience so far?

A: My membership experience has been truly rewarding. As a result of my active involvement in AACCI I was awarded three graduate fellowships that positively impacted my graduate school experience and helped me obtain job offers as I began my career in the cereal grains industry. Eventually, through AACCI I received food industry references who supported my employment opportunities, including my current job at Solvaira Specialties. The most exciting moments of my career involved traveling to Europe to implement projects based on EU food regulations.

Q: What have you learned from your membership in AACCI?

A: My membership in AACCI has enabled me to work collaboratively with professional members on the successful submission of a session proposal for a 2017 AACCI Annual Meeting symposium. As a co-organizer I have actively participated in abstract writing and identification of potential presenters. I will be speaking on a collaborative research study involving university and food industry members examining naturally enhanced gluten functionality for flat bread and specialty product processing.

Q: What’s next for you?

A: I want to be the best partner that food processors and our customers have ever had in product development. I strive to increase my expertise in the food industry and also engage as a mentor to current and future food science and technology students at various universities and programs all over the world.

We will be conducting interviews with members to be featured in future issues of *Cereal Foods World*. If you know someone who has dedicated significant time to AACCI and the field of cereal grain science, let us know! Contact Lauren McGinty at lmcginty@scisoc.org.