GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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2022 AFE Scholarship Recipients Announced

Jennifer Zurko

The graduate work of this year's Paul Ecke, Jr. and Altman Family Scholarship recipients is already reshaping the floriculture and horticulture industry with improvements for growers and environmental benefits.

The five scholars—each with résumés listing numerous accomplishments in fieldwork, academic presentations and published research—have contributed to the growing scientific understanding of the industry.

- **2022 Paul Ecke, Jr. Scholarship—Juan Quijia Pillajo, The Ohio State University:** The Paul Ecke, Jr. Scholar awards $5,000 a year for two years ($10,000 total) to a dedicated MS/Ph.D. student attending a U.S. land-grant university. Juan earned a Bachelor of Science in agriculture at Zamorano University, where he began his more-focused educational journey in the floral industry. Wanting to learn the science behind microbial-based products and how they work, he returned to The Ohio State University, where he's currently in the second year of his Ph.D. program. His lab has a collection of around 1,000 bacteria, all of which are being screened to see which are best to improve phosphorus and iron nutrition.
- **Second-Year Funding Awarded Paul Ecke, Jr. Scholarship—Caleb Spall, Michigan State University:** Caleb's research is on greenhouse cultivation of specialty cut flowers. Because of AFE's second-year funding, he can continue conducting research investigating how specialty cut flowers respond to changes in the greenhouse lighting environment.
- **2022 Altman Family Scholars:** Created in 2015 by Ken and Deena Altman, this scholarship seeks to support improvement in horticulture education and research by investing in outstanding, young industry professionals. This scholarship provides an annual scholarship ($5,000) to promising and dedicated graduate students pursuing a career in horticulture.
- A former Paul Ecke Jr. Scholar, **Melissa Muñoz** is eager to share her research into plant pathology with anyone, but especially growers back in her homeland of Colombia. Her work is about mitigating Botrytis on the petals of roses. In earning her master's degree in plant and environmental sciences at Clemson University, Melissa worked on a Botrytis management project in cut roses. Through this project, she focused on characterizing the fungus and understanding its biology and infection process, and current management strategies.
- **Kaitlin Swiantek** wants to help build a pollinator highway by breeding landscaping plants that appeal to

the everyday consumer. Her vision is currently focused on cultivating a variety of mountain mint (Pycnanthemum) that's attractive to both humans and pollinators. With help from the Altman Family Scholarship, Kaitlin said she will expand her breeding program to screen more plants and achieve more phenotypic variation of the mountain mint. She hopes to hire more student assistants to help in the lab at the University of Georgia, where she's working towards a Master of Science in horticulture.

- In the fourth year of her Ph.D. program at Michigan State University, **Prabhjot Kaur** is researching whether you could reduce production times and input costs from greenhouse heating and other resources in the floriculture industry, growing petunia at suboptimal, lower temperatures, faster for less. She's focusing on understanding the genetics of development rate (rate at which plants produce new nodes), primarily in petunia. **GT**