



Grow With Us!



## Employee Profile Research Scientist

Shahrokh is a Research Scientist for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC). As a plant breeder, Shahrokh develops new varieties of plants, particularly small fruits like strawberries, raspberries, and tree fruits like plums and apples.

“The ultimate goal for a breeder is to develop a new variety which becomes commercially successful in Canada,” says Shahrokh. “And the icing on the cake is getting to name a new variety of fruit and be used by the grower nationally and, if possible, internationally!”

Shahrokh recently worked on the development of a non-browning apple, called Eden. It was developed primarily for use in salads, dried apple chips and juice. It stays fresh longer than most other kinds of apples.

Shahrokh says one of the most important things about being a scientist is being open to learning new skills and always striving to know more. “I constantly stayed curious and with that came the desire to study different areas,” he says.

“Often the science of plant breeding does not bring instant results; you have to have a lot of patience,” he says. “Many times patience and science go hand in hand. For this reason, I do a number of short-term projects as well. This fills the gap that can sometimes be very long while waiting for the results from long term studies.”

Shahrokh visits elementary schools to talk to kids about food and science. “Nowadays more youth are entering into the computer technology fields,” he says. “Fewer and fewer become interested

in science, or want to touch horticulture. They are given technology all the time and this is not a bad thing, but there is a need for those who carry on the practice of science.”

Shahrokh is a firm believer in teamwork because with teams comes diverse ideas. He likes to learn what other research colleagues are doing, and says that working in a group can help get projects done much faster.

“When you work with others, the group can help fill in many answers. For example, a new strawberry variety could take me 10 years to develop, but in a group it can take five because there are many hands and minds to address the tasks.”

Shahrokh was offered a post-doctoral position with AAFC, while he was working as a professor of plant science at McGill University in Montreal. Although the area of breeding wasn't his specialty at the time, he was eager to learn.

A university Bachelor of Science degree is required for this line of work. As you progress in your career, a Masters or PhD is preferable. Shahrokh says that in his line of work, education is 50 per cent, and the other half comes from the skills, intuition and lessons he has learned along the way.

The greatest thing about his job is diversity. “I discover new things every day,” Shahrokh says. “My job brings me a lot of joy because it is always different, always changing. I drive an hour each way to and from work every day and people ask me why I would do this. It's because I truly love what I'm doing.”

