



UNIVERSITY OF  
**GEORGIA**

College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences  
*Institute of Plant Breeding, Genetics & Genomics*

## **We would like to extend a very warm welcome to our new PBGG graduate students for SPRING 2024:**

**Chloe Dela Cerna**

**Anita Giabardo**

**Sindoora Nalajala**

**Khyathi Madduru**

**Saptarshi Mondal**

**Jackline Litunya**

**Gurjot Singh Sidhu**

**Samantha Wan**



*Chloe Dela Cerna*

**Ms. Chloe Dela Cerna's** PHD research focuses on secondary metabolite production of tall fescue endophytes for forage breeding. She received her Associate of Science degree in Crop and Soil Science from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (2020) and Bachelor of Science in Agriculture degree in Agriscience and Environmental Systems (2023).

Chloe's previous work experience includes two undergraduate research positions at the University of Georgia working with Dr. Bob Schmitz (2021) and Dr. Ali Missaoui (2022). She also worked for UGA Extension in Colquitt County as an Agriculture and Natural Resources Intern. (2021).

Chloe is a PHD Graduate Research Associate with Dr. Ali Missaoui. Her workspace is located in Miller Plant Sciences, Rm. 4311 and her email is [chloe.delacerna@uga.edu](mailto:chloe.delacerna@uga.edu). Please help welcome her to IPBGG!

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*Anita Giabardo*

**Ms. Anita Giabardo** started her PhD in Plant Breeding, Genetics and Genomics in January 2024. She works as a research assistant in Dr. Buell's lab, where she uses advanced genomics techniques to investigate the genetic basis of several poplar traits and biological processes. Her research is integral to the Biopoplar project, a larger initiative aiming to re-engineer poplar as a multipurpose crop species for the production of diverse bioproducts, including bioplastics and biofuels.

Anita earned a Bachelor's degree in Viticulture and Enology from the University of Padova in 2020. She transitioned to UGA through to the Sustainable Agriculture dual degree MS program, jointly offered by the University of Padova and UGA. During her MS research, Anita served as a research assistant in Dr. Missaoui's forage breeding lab, working on soil carbon sequestration in switchgrass.

After completing her MS, Anita entered the Integrated Plant Sciences PhD program, and this Spring officially joined IPBGG and Dr. Robin Buell's lab as a PHD Graduate Research Assistant, following her passion for genomics and bioinformatics.

Please help us welcome Anita to IPBGG! Her lab is located in CAGT 240 and her email is [anita.giabardo@uga.edu](mailto:anita.giabardo@uga.edu)



*Sindoor Nalajala*

**Ms. Sindoor Nalajala** is a Graduate Research Assistant in the IPBGG Ph.D. program. She is working with Dr. Ye (Juliet) Chu and her research entails blueberry genomics breeding.

Sindoor received her Bachelor of Science (Honours) degree from Professor Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University, India (2020). She received her Master of Science degree in Genetics and Plant Breeding from Central Agricultural University, India (2022).

Her previous work experience includes a position as research fellow in Groundnut Genetics and Breeding at International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (2023). Sindoor was also a member of Board of Studies, Central Agricultural University (2020-2022).

Please welcome Sindoor to IPBGG! Her workspace is in NESPAL room 219, Tifton; her email address is: [Sindoor.Nalajala@uga.edu](mailto:Sindoor.Nalajala@uga.edu).



*Khyathi Madduru*

**Ms. Muni Khyathi Madduru** is a Graduate Research Assistant; PhD student in the IPBGG joining UGA in Spring, 2024. She works with Dr. Patrick Conner in the Pecan Breeding program.

Khyathi holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture (2016-2020) and a Master of Science degree specializing in Genetics and Plant Breeding (2020-2022) from Acharya N. G. Ranga Agricultural University, Andhra Pradesh, India. She previously worked as a Teaching Assistant (2022-2023) at the Regional Agricultural Research Station, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Please welcome Khyathi to IPBGG! Her workspace is located in CAGT Room 248 and she can be reached at [mm81444@uga.edu](mailto:mm81444@uga.edu).



*Saptarshi Mondal*

**Mr. Saptarshi Mondal** has joined IPBGG this Spring by way of Crop and Soil Sciences. He is a PHD Graduate Research Assistant with Dr. David Jespersen's lab on the Griffin campus.

Saptarshi says, "My preliminary steps toward the world of biological sciences were paved by my father, who is a teacher in botany. I graduated with a BS in Agriculture (Hons.) from Visva Bharati, West Bengal, India. Then I moved to Punjab Agricultural University (PAU), India to pursue my MS in Plant Breeding and Genetics with ICAR-PG scholarship from the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi. After graduation, I worked as Senior Research Fellow at PAU and BCKV, India. Presently, my doctoral research aims to explore the molecular genetics and physiological aspects of salt tolerance in different turfgrasses and crop species under the worthy guidance of Dr. David Jespersen."

Please help us officially welcome Saptarshi into IPBGG. His lab is located in the Redding Building on the Griffin Campus, and his email is [Saptarshi.mondal@uga.edu](mailto:Saptarshi.mondal@uga.edu)



*Jackline Litunya*

**Ms. Jackline Litunya** recently received her bachelor's degree in Agricultural sciences from EARTH University, Costa Rica (2024). She was a Mastercard Foundation Scholar, which offered me the four-year scholarship in Costa Rica.

Jackline says that she has always enjoyed farming and aspired to be a plant scientist. It was while working at Michigan State University (2022) in the dry bean breeding program, that Jackline realized that she enjoyed the work of a breeder.

Here, Jackline will be working on her MS with Dr. Cecilia McGregor on virus resistance in watermelon. Please give a warm welcome to Jackline. Her lab is located at 1111 Miller Plant Sciences, and her email is [jackline.litunya@uga.edu](mailto:jackline.litunya@uga.edu)



*Gurjot Sidhu*

**Mr. Gurjot Singh Sidhu** received his master's degree in Plant Breeding, Genetics, and Genomics from IPBGG in 2021. He worked with Dr. Peggy Ozias-Akins studying the controlled induction of parthenogenesis in rice.

After graduation, Gurjot started as a Research Technician with Dr. Katrien Devos, working on switchgrass, a potential biofuel crop, and finger millet, an orphan crop being grown in Africa and India. Working with switchgrass gave him an opportunity to engage with researchers from the Center for Bioenergy Innovation (CBI), which is funded by the US Department of Energy for developing Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) from crops like switchgrass and poplar. This exposure led Gurjot to develop a keen interest in bioenergy and the role plant breeding can play in tackling climate change. His Ph.D. research in Devos lab will focus on identifying the genetic basis of some key traits in switchgrass important for biofuel production.

Please help us welcome Gurjot back to IPBGG as a new PHD student! His workspace is located in the Devos Lab in Miller Plant Sciences, and his email is [gurjotsingh@uga.edu](mailto:gurjotsingh@uga.edu)



*Samantha Wan*

**Mrs. Samantha Wan** is a Research Assistant in the IPBGG Ph.D. program for 2024, working with Dr. Peng Chee. Her work includes identification and validation of cotton fiber and seed quality quantitative trait loci. She is currently a Cotton Incorporated Fellow committed to improving cotton fiber and seed quality through cooperative research projects.

Samantha received her Bachelor of Science degree in Agriscience and Environmental Systems with an emphasis in Plant Breeding, Genetics and Genomics from UGA (2021). She received her Master of Science degree in Plant Breeding, Genetics and Genomics from UGA, IPBGG (2023).

Mrs. Wan's previous work experiences includes a position as a research assistant in Dr. Chee's lab during her undergrad, at which time she was named an Undergraduate Borlaug Scholar (2020-2021); additionally, she held several other positions while pursuing her Undergraduate degree.

Let's welcome Samantha back to our Institute as a new PHD student! Her work space is located on Tifton Campus, NESPAL Rm 222, and her email is: [sam.wan@uga.edu](mailto:sam.wan@uga.edu).