



# Institute for the Advancement of Food and Nutrition Sciences

## **Interview with IAFNS Summer Research Opportunity Fellow Jennifer Bean**

This transcript has been edited for clarity and length.

### **IAFNS**

Please tell us your name and a bit about yourself.

### **Jennifer Bean**

My name is Jennifer Bean. I am a master's-prepared registered dietician licensed to practice in the state of Missouri. And I am in the dissertation year of my PhD as a modern student. And so I'm looking to defend next summer at the University of Missouri in Columbia.

### **IAFNS**

How did you hear about IAFNS?

### **Jennifer Bean**

I am a member of the Research Dietitians Practice Group, as is IAFNS' Marie Latulippe. She had posted about this opportunity, and I would like to transition from academia. I've been teaching for a number of years that has a zero after it, and it's not 10. And so I would like to transition to a different kind of science communication. So that's what really sparked my interest and especially digging into IAFNS and then understanding the role and the goal of the organization. I really wanted to be involved with translating science and involving all of the pillars that IAFNS is a part of. So research on foods science and making that into policy as well as everyone coming together to communicate that for better public health was attractive.

### **IAFNS**

Tell us a little bit about your project -- what did you do this summer?

## **Jennifer Bean**

Absolutely, I got to flex my creative brain a little bit which is not something I get to do as a PhD student focused on very basic science questions. I got to work with the [Sodium in Food & Health Implications Committee](#). If you didn't already know — probably most people do — that the FDA recently put together a guideline, sort of a voluntary set of goals to really, to say, hey, food manufacturers, please reduce the amount of sodium that's in our food supply through your products. So IAFNS has put together a fantastic seven-part series communicating what are we doing, what do we know we need to do, what's been done and what do we know that we're not doing on sodium? And then a last part was, what do we even not think about, right? The known knowns, the known unknowns, and those unknown unknowns as well. And so what I got to do is to translate those works into more graphical format in a way that could be easily shared, as well as have a tangible, easy to grasp concept for different audiences. So, I got to make science into a more tangible thing, which is what I really enjoy doing. It's what my passion really is.

## **IAFNS**

What did you draw from in making the infographics?

## **Jennifer Bean**

There are a series of videos you made that I based them on. So, some of the handouts are targeted at the consumer and specifically those messages are making sure we understand that the saltshaker is not where Americans are getting their sodium intake and that sodium intake is higher than what's recommended. Some of the processed foods that we purchase at the grocery or that we get at restaurants are contributing to our high sodium intake. The consumer messaging there is essentially answering that question, well, why can't they just make it with less salt? So, addressing the fact that there are technical issues as salt does more in food besides improving flavor. And then there is the more technical aspect, because I made five handouts that have different target audiences. Some are more scientific in nature and some are more data-oriented, focused on what we know about the quality of our data. So, whether it's the communication one, which is what can I do as a consumer to lower my sodium? What should I look for as a consumer in my favorite products, my favorite brands as they are endeavoring to do this? And then on the scientific side, it's what do we need to do as scientists and healthcare professionals and public health professionals as far as like talking more, asking for more guidance on these reductions, asking for more data sharing — those sorts of things.

## **IAFNS**

How do you hope that they're used? What's the follow-on from your project this summer?

### **Jennifer Bean**

My hope is that it actually guides people to the seven-part series that it's an “aha” moment because it is one piece of paper or if they want to look at all five, they'll see that there's more information that I'm really only giving almost like the equivalent of a sound bite. So, an example it says high sodium intake increases blood pressure — the main contributor to premature death and disability and then in a bigger font Americans consume almost 50 more sodium than recommended and then right underneath that some processed and packaged foods and restaurant meals contribute to sodium intake. So if someone wants to know more it has the link to the IAFNS website for the [sodium webinar series](#). So, a way to share those small bites of information that draws people in to get more information or even just to get them talking: talking to talking to their research peers; or if we're talking about regulators or policy talking more with policymakers, or if they're at their kitchen or restaurant table. I think that that's what's really necessary is greater conversation and greater connections because it is a solvable problem.

## **IAFNS**

Are sectors taking action in terms of formulation of products?

### **Jennifer Bean**

Many already are. So there's a lot of folks, a lot of our favorite brands are already making lots of strides, if not meeting some metrics, in fact, being a little bit ahead of the curve. So, I think maybe for, from what I would like for our industry partners and our industry friends is that they see that their efforts are recognized, that they are doing it. So anatta-boy or atta-girl for those efforts recognizing they are doing a good job.

## **IAFNS**

Tell us a little bit about your exposure to folks from different sectors during your IAFNS experience while you worked on the handouts.

### **Jennifer Bean**

Well, I got to go to the June 4-5 [Annual Summer Science Symposium](#), so I got to see a lot of folks, and that was the beginning of my research internship that I had, so I made a lot of connections there by interacting with like-minded people but also with individual interview kind of things. And then Marie Latulippe connected me with some other people who expressed interest, mostly those folks from industry, who I met with after the

summer symposium. I've been able to work most closely with the sodium committee. So there's a lot of folks that are in industry and regulatory or policy for both the United States and Canada. And that was just an area that I'm very interested in practicing in after I finish my PhD. And of course there were academics and I get to live in that stew every day here in Missouri. I did just hear one of the experts speak last semester, but it was really nice to have the more personal connection with someone. It's almost like when you're at an in-person party and someone says, "Oh, I'd like you to meet my friend. They work here and do this, I think you have shared interests." So that was quite valuable. I am trying to think of how many connections I was able to make. And it's kind of hard because there's so many that have come out of this experience and at different levels.

## **IAFNS**

Does Canada face similar challenges in terms of overconsumption or are they in a very different world?

### **Jennifer Bean**

They're in a similar boat. They have a different context, but very similar regulatory pathways. But yeah, Canadians are in the same boat with consuming more sodium than we should and less potassium than we should, but that's a little off topic. I had to narrow my scope when putting together these infographic materials for this because I needed to really stay on message and not add the potassium story. I'm hopeful that I can address it, because I will actually be talking with sodium committee members later today. And if I can get my edits in, I'll be asking if I can make a potassium handout as well.

## **IAFNS**

Before we wrap up, what advice would you have for future fellows that are considering a summer research opportunity fellowship with IAFNS?

### **Jennifer Bean**

I'd say take advantage of all the people that are wanting to connect with you, because they really do. I mean, it's not simply like, "Well, I guess so because mentorships important." They really do have wonderful life experiences to talk with you about and career experiences because I think one thing that more traditional students have in their mind, but they think that your career goes from point A to point B to point C in a very linear fashion as you grow. I have yet to meet a single professional where that was the case. There's a lot of circuitous paths and then someone will be like, "I just happened to be at this meeting and touched base with this person and we had this project and that

led to this whole other thing that I do now.” So, I think that's the biggest advice is to take advantage of the people that say they want to talk to you because they really do.

## **IAFNS**

Any final thoughts?

## **Jennifer Bean**

Your network is your net worth. And so knowing people, knowing what they do, being able to meet people, hear what they do, those interactions spark connections in your own mind amongst topics to give you ideas on whatever it is you're working on. But even then, they know you, and you know them, and when they have a project in mind, they can say, you know what? There was this student that I got to work with, and I really think they have great insights. And then, especially if you're already connected on LinkedIn, and you're able to interact that way, you have those folks in your network. And that's absolutely priceless when it comes to career development.

## **IAFNS**

Thank you and all the best in the coming years.