



Lavanya Venkateswar

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Food Ingredients, USA

Inspiring the Next Generation of Women in STEM

What do you enjoy most about your role at Univar Solutions?

I enjoy combining my technical expertise as a food scientist with business acumen as a brand manager, in order to connect the dots for our customers as they seek out food ingredient technology and new product innovation. We're in a unique position to be a one-stop shop for our customers' needs.

Describe how you used innovation to overcome a challenge in your field.

As a brand manager at a consumer packaged goods (CPG) food company, I reduced our time to market by half by creating an agile product development process. To reduce the launch time, I started an innovation day, inviting suppliers to participate. The suppliers presented finished product concepts with their ingredients, and I took the concepts into consumer testing, determined the best fit for our brand, and commercialized the new product in six months.

When I came to Univar Solutions, I worked with the same company at their innovation day. We leveraged our strategic suppliers' ingredient portfolios, and our application development team presented finished concepts. The customer chose one of our products, and we won new business!

How are you working to inspire the next generation of women in STEM?

I have two school-age daughters who look up to me and make me want to do my best. For the last seven years, I've coached two middle school Science Olympiad teams through numerous competitions. I'm also a middle-school coach for the "You Be the Chemist" program that Univar Solutions sponsors with Chemical Educational Foundation, and I work closely with our school district's college and career readiness program on a robust food science curriculum. I'm honored to help get young girls excited about science, technology, and developing innovative and impactful solutions to everyday problems.

What advice would you give to the next generation of women in STEM?

Find a role model, mentor or successful and inspirational woman in a position of influence early in your career, and regularly connect with them. Try out a breadth of experiences and establish an ongoing learning plan through structured classes or practical work. Have confidence in your abilities and give yourself time and mental space for cultivating creativity.

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