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Archbold receives awards from research network

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Dr. Hilary Swain, 2021 recipient of the LTAR Founders Award. COURTESY/DUSTIN ANGELL



Shefali Azad, 2021 recipient of the LTAR Network Impact Award. COURTESY/DUSTIN ANGELL

VENUS — Archbold Executive Director Dr. Hilary Swain and Archbold Data Manager Shefali Azad were both recognized at this year's annual scientific meeting by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Long-Term Agroecosystem (LTAR) Research Network for their contributions to the network. Archbold's Buck Island Ranch, partnered with the University of Florida's Range Cattle Research and Education Center, is one of 18 sites nationwide selected to form a science network for cross-site experiments and interdisciplinary research. The goal of the LTAR Network is to understand how to sustain food production while decreasing environmental impacts and maintaining rural prosperity.

Swain received the LTAR Founders Award in recognition of long-term leadership contributions that have influenced the vision and direction of the LTAR Network. She was nominated by the Central Plains Experimental Range site because “Hilary has exemplified the true essence of network-centric focus in her long-term leadership contributions to LTAR that have been highly instrumental in the vision and direction of this network. Hilary’s steadfast commitment to cross-site and network-level research, products, and impact are a testament to her unwavering foundation to prioritize the ‘WE’ (LTAR) not the ‘ME’ (individual site).”

This was a particularly relevant theme at LTAR’s 2021 annual meeting, which focused on developing partnerships with other science networks in North America and Europe, while simultaneously enhancing engagement with local stakeholders.

Reflecting on this honor, Swain said, “I am deeply honored by the Founders Award. LTAR has been one of the most rewarding professional experiences of my career and has made a huge impact on science at Archbold’s Buck Island Ranch and the Archbold-UFL LTAR site in Florida. I treasure my interactions with colleagues across the network: I have learned far more from the LTAR community than I will ever be able to contribute. My sincere gratitude to all.”

Azad received the LTAR Network Impact Award in recognition of individual and group network-level accomplishments that enable the LTAR Network to advance a vision for the sustainable intensification of US agriculture. Azad was nominated by the Central Plains Experimental Range site because, “Shefali’s exceptional leadership in data management has had transformational impacts on sharing data within the LTAR Network.” According to her colleagues, “Shefali’s outstanding commitment to leading network data management activities focused on making data findable, accessible, interoperable and re-usable in a coherent data model for use by LTAR scientists and beyond.”

When asked for details on the effort, Azad said, “This was definitely a ‘cat herding’ kind of project. We had to ask every LTAR site to rummage through decades of crop harvests or grazing records or weather data, repackage it into a meaningful common format, add land management notes and geospatial references, and finally publish it online for posterity. The work still isn’t complete, but it’s been a joy working with a diverse group of people that are committed to the same ultimate goal of data accessibility. I hope the lessons we’ve learned make the process smoother for future groups, and I’m excited to report we’ve already been approached by multiple scientists interested in using these datasets for their research.”

Archbold is deeply proud of Hilary Swain and Shefali Azad for being recognized for their leadership, commitment and dedication to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Long-Term Agroecosystem Research Network. An important role that Archbold plays is sharing the knowledge generated at Buck Island Ranch with the public and policymakers to ensure that everyone understands the enormous value of Florida ranchlands, including food production, biodiversity, water conservation, and carbon cycling. This helps ensure that that ranching remains a vibrant part of Florida's economy, culture and heritage. To learn more about agroecology research at Archbold's Buck Island Ranch and LTAR, visit the website: www.archbold-station.org/html/research/agro/agroovw.html and LTAR's website: www.ltarnetwork.org.