Member Spotlight

Joseph Kasnadi

Tell us a little about yourself and your connection with Maryland IFT. We'd love to hear your story!!

My mother's side is mostly here in Maryland and my immediate family immigrated from Indonesia in the 90s. My first undergrad studies was at the University of Maryland in Biology and I first worked in research before moving into biotech manufacturing. From a young age, I was interested in STEM but also food so I also worked part time in food service. After some time in pharmaceutical and medical device companies, I went back to school for Culinary training ending with Johnson & Wales, and a Food Science master's with the University of Maine. Through both of those programs, I learned of the IFT, was advised by the previous President Mary-Ellen Camire, and ultimately combined my backgrounds to work in Food R&D.

What inspired you to pursue a career in food science?

Food science was a bit of an accident. I was interested in food and science separately but only later found that there was a combined discipline. I don't think there was a specific thing that could be called an inspiration for the pursuit. I'd probably have to blame it on innate curiosity towards STEM, with the practical craft of cooking. Pharmaceuticals and medical devices just don't taste good, but you want to understand and be able to replicate foods you like.

Can you share a bit about your current role and how your work contributes to advancing food science, quality, policy, or innovation?

My current role in R&D with the seasoning company Elite Spice has me creating, innovating, and problem solving for the industry. On the more practical side, I find myself tackling ongoing real world problems presented by policy, environment, and consumer inputs. For a more personal take, I view the work as an opportunity to share joys and sometimes bewilderment of different foods and their cultures. Being a 1st generation immigrant, bridging that gap of communication has been a necessary skill. Having done a fair bit of traveling, sharing new experiences between others is rewarding, exciting, and sometimes even a little entertaining.

What is one challenge or opportunity you see shaping the future of the food industry?

Policy, cultural mismatch and movement, and artificial intelligence are all applicable. One aspect I hear less about but can provide additional input on is the limitations of A.I. on development given some of my past exposure and training in Neuroscience and Philosophy. There are 2 things A.I. struggles with as far as I know. One is the translation of human perceptual experience, especially taking into account culturally and environmentally dictated preferences. A.I. may be able to provide general base functional recipes, but quantifying the senses and then tailoring to different audiences I don't think is in reach. The other is in A.I.'s creative limitations. To my understanding, A.I. highly leverages existing information as its research base and recombines them in different ways. I'm not sure if or when A.I. can recognize what it doesn't know. There is only the prompt or code. Biological drive possibly stems from survival through innovation. Fiction likes to depict machines with self preservation but I'm not sure why and how that'd be implemented. Maybe that can be seen as both a challenge or opportunity depending on which side of the A.I. debate everyone is on.

What advice would you give to students or early-career professionals interested in building a career in this field?

Connection through food, and understanding through science. Food science is a complicated interdisciplinary field that isn't straightforward to get into. It involves exploration and meandering that takes luck and patience.