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George diCenzo Awarded 2025 J. Roger Porter Award

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The United States Culture Collection Network (USCCN) is pleased to announce that Dr. George diCenzo, Associate Professor at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada, has been awarded the 2025 J. Roger Porter Award in recognition of his visionary leadership in developing the Canadian Collection of Agricultural Soil Microbes (CCASM) and his transformative contributions to microbial resource stewardship.

The prestigious J. Roger Porter Award recognizes scientists who have demonstrated the value of microbial biodiversity through continuous curatorial or stewardship activities for resources used by the scientific community.

In recent years, diCenzo has emerged as a leader in Canadian microbiology. Through the $6.5 million BENEFIT project he co-leads, he developed CCASM to address a critical problem: agriculturally relevant bacteria isolated by researchers often remained inaccessible in individual laboratory freezers, leading to duplicated efforts and lost opportunities.

Initiated in 2024, with public release planned for early 2026, CCASM already contains approximately 3,000 isolates from Canadian agricultural regions. What sets diCenzo's approach apart is the unprecedented scope of data collected for each isolate, including whole genome sequences and functional data such as plant growth promotion potential, persistence in soil, and fitness under industrially relevant conditions. The collection will also host "cultivars" enhanced through experimental evolution for specific applications.

Beyond CCASM, diCenzo is internationally recognized for his work on rhizobial genomics and taxonomy. He established gold-standard guidelines for the family *Rhizobiaceae* and best practices in the phylogenomics of this taxon. This fundamental work has significant implications for accurately naming isolates in culture collections, and for identifying and utilizing rhizobia in agriculture, where accurate taxonomic information is crucial for obtaining regulatory approval of new commercial products.

diCenzo also leads the "Open Plastic" project, which aims to identify microorganisms capable of breaking down plastic waste, demonstrating his commitment to addressing global challenges through microbial innovation.

His work has attracted significant interest from industry, with companies expressing interest in commercializing BENEFIT project outcomes.

About the J. Porter Award

The prestigious J. Roger Porter Award recognizes outstanding efforts by a scientist who has demonstrated the importance of microbial biodiversity through sustained curatorial or stewardship activities for a major resource used by the scientific community. It honors the memory of the internationally known microbiologist J. Roger Porter (1909-1979) and his remarkable contributions to science. More information, including purpose, eligibility, nomination process, and past laureates is available at usccn.org/porter-award

About USCCN

The United States Culture Collection Network (USCCN) is a Research Coordination Network supported by the U.S. National Science Foundation through grants #1534564 and #2124633. The mission of the USCCN is to facilitate the safe and responsible utilization of microbial resources for research, education, industry, medicine, and agriculture for the betterment of humankind. For more information, visit usccn.org and follow the network on Twitter and LinkedIn.

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