

## Sridhar Polavarapu (1962-2004)

On 7 May 2004, the scientific community lost an energetic and upcoming entomologist. On that fateful Friday at 9.45 p.m. Sridhar Polavarapu passed away surrounded by his family, parents, in-laws and friends. Sridhar, as he was affectionately called by people who knew him, had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in the fall of 2003. He fought a losing battle against the dreaded disease which quickly consumed him in a matter of months. At the time of his death he was only 42 and at the prime of his career. He is survived by his wife Madhavi, whom he was married for 13 years, two children- daughter Sameera (seven), son Vinay (three), two younger sisters and parents.



Sridhar was born on 30 April 1962 in Angaluru, AP, India. His father, Sivaprasad Polavarapu was a railways employee and his mother Krishnakumari was a school teacher. He was the eldest of the three children. After his early education in Gundakal, Sridhar joined Marathwada Agricultural University, Parbhani, India where he obtained a BSc, degree in 1981. Subsequently, he graduated from the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore, India with an MSc, in 1984. Even in those days Sridhar was very much interested in insect pest management; and soon after graduation he worked for a year at the International Crop Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and then for two years at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

Sridhar came to Canada in 1987 for higher studies. He joined the insect pheromone laboratory of Bill Seabrook at University of New Brunswick, Fredericton as a graduate student and received his PhD, degree in 1994. With his thesis research on blueberry pest management he easily landed a faculty position at the Department of Entomology, Rutgers University in 1994 where he served as the Associate Director and extension specialist at the Phillip E. Marucci Blueberry and Cranberry Research and Extension Center, Chatsworth, NJ.

Although his career was relatively short, just about 10 years, at Rutgers, he managed to accomplish more at the university than many would do during a life-long career. He focused his research on the development of environmentally friendly management strategies with minimum use of broad spectrum insecticides. He was able to achieve his objectives by intelligent use of various techniques including mating disruption, biodegradable target specific insecticides such as Bts, insect growth regulators, egg parasitoids, entomopathogenic nematodes etc. In his research he collaborated with many top entomologists in US and Canada and published numerous scientific and extension papers on blueberry and cranberry pest management.

Through his competitiveness and scientific excellence Sridhar secured large research grants and as recently as 2003 he obtained a million-dollar grant for development and implementation of reduced risk pest management strategies for blueberries. Even when he was quite ill he continued to conduct research from his house through constant discussions with his post-doctoral fellows and technicians. After his death, he has left behind substantial endowment that he has asked to be used for entomological research. With funds secured the research he started is being continued by his post-doctoral fellows.

Sridhar worked closely with blueberry and cranberry growers, identifying their problems and coming up with solutions. He worked with the farmers in the field to ensure that the new techniques he

developed are used effectively. He secured numerous labels for pesticides needed for the control of insect pests. He always kept in touch with growers and gave them guidelines and 52 *Bulletin of the Entomological Society of Canada* Volume 37(1), March 2005 advice through his letters in *Blueberry Bulletin*, *Cranberry Newsletter*, etc... He routinely lectured at Extension growers meetings.

Sridhar's dedication to his research, and its practical application was such that even when he was sick, he managed to conduct a highly successful, first Advanced Blueberry School in east in March 2004. For all his accomplishments and service to the blueberry and cranberry growers of NJ he was presented with the prestigious Abraham Weisblatt Award on 22 April 2004. This award, one of the highest given annually by Cook College recognizes an individual who demonstrates "across the board" excellence in teaching, research and extension. Post-humously Sridhar's service and achievements have been recognized by several organizations. New Jersey Department of Agriculture bestowed him with a distinguished service award in their annual meeting in Atlantic City. The Association of Indian Entomologists in North America dedicated their November 2004 conference to Sridhar. The blueberry and cranberry growers of New Jersey are planning award presentations in their regional meetings. Sridhar did reach out to many people in agricultural and entomological communities and had an impact on them at a personal level that he never realized.

Personally, I have known Sridhar since 1987. He was a man of integrity. He was passionate about his research and eager to talk about it. He was unselfish, unpretentious and cared for everyone around him. He always greeted you with a big smile and hello. He was fond of the game cricket and had won some trophies while he was in college in India. In spite of his busy professional activities, he found time to spend with his children. He frequently played "horsie" with his son Vinay. He was very fond of his daughter Sameera with whom he loved to go out to collect fireflies. Sridhar was an incredible husband, loving father, son, brother and friend to many. He will be sorely missed by everyone who was fortunate enough of knowing him.

— P. Sivasubramanian, Fredericton, New Brunswick