

## Academic wins prestigious VC's Research Excellence Award



*Dr Rajeev Bhat receiving his award from the FNU Vice Chancellor, Professor Nigel Healey.*

It was a gratifying moment for Dr Rajeev Bhat to be awarded the inaugural Vice-Chancellor's Award for Research Excellence during the College of Engineering, Science and Technology (CEST) graduation ceremony earlier this month.

The prestigious award is given to an individual researcher whose research activity has achieved considerable impact and recognition outside the University.

Dr Bhat, an Associate Professor of Food Technology and Head of Department of Food Science and Home Economics at CEST said he was honoured to be recognised for his research contributions.

The academic said such recognitions motivate researchers to work harder and sets the bar for accomplishments even higher for themselves and encourages them to contribute more to uplift the image of their departments and the organisation as a whole.

"I would like to acknowledge the Office of the Pro Vice Chancellor (Research) and the Vice Chancellor for initiating the Research Excellence award. This is a great way to showcase to the public the work of the academics in the research arena apart from normal teaching responsibilities," Dr Bhat said.

The soft-spoken Dr Bhat has more than 19 years of Research and Teaching experience in the field of agri-food technology with research expertise on various issues pertaining to 'Sustainable Food Production'.

He has gained extensive research experience by working in countries like India, South Korea, Malaysia, Germany and now in Fiji.

Dr Bhat was born and brought up in Mysore, India – the city of joy and culture! It is known for its royal heritage and magnificent buildings and monuments.

"I have always had close links with the farming community since childhood and that is when I developed the passion towards sustainable food practices," said Dr Bhat.

"My wife also comes from a farming background in India and by observing various challenges the farmers face, my interest in assisting the farming communities boosted. We should never forget that farmers are the backbone of a nation and their contribution to any regional economy is invaluable," he said.

Dr Bhat joined the Fiji National University (FNU) in March 2016. Since then he has been focusing on bringing visibility to the Food Science Department nationally and internationally via his networks and research publications.

According to Dr Bhat, with the availability of natural resources in Fiji, there is a lot of scope in research for agri-food sector.

"Some of the innovative research activities that need to be undertaken in Fiji includes value addition for local agricultural produce, study of the impact of food processing on non-communicable diseases, evaluation of the effect of changing climate change patterns on quality and safety of foods, introducing innovative post-harvest technologies and so forth."

"Currently, there are several sustainability challenges that needs to be overcome in agri-food technology based research in Fiji. We are working towards overcoming these challenges through contributions from our research activities," said Dr Bhat.

He is also a free-lance writer who pens his thoughts on food and health in local newspaper so that vital information reaches the local consumers.

Dr Bhat has almost 200 research publications in International Scientific Indexing (ISI) based journals and referred book chapters which were cited 6,300 times, carrying a h-index of 39 in Google scholar and 30 in Scopus database. (A h-index indicates how productive and influential a researcher is in the field.)

The 42-year-old has four edited books, 1 authored book (in press), sits on the editorial board of leading international journals and has been a scientific committee member and invited speaker at various international conferences.

Dr Bhat has successfully undertaken and completed funded research projects, as well as supervised student research projects.

He is also a recipient of prestigious international awards and recognitions, some of which includes; 'Excellence Recognition Award' conferred by the Association of Agricultural Technology in South-East Asia, 'Prosper.Net-Scopus Award in Sustainable Development' conferred by the United Nations Uni. Japan, 'IUFOST/Fi Young Scientist Excellence Award', conferred by the International Union of Food Science and Technology, Canada, Global Achievers Award conferred by the Institute of Oriental Heritage, India and Best Researcher Award 2017 from CEST, FNU.

As a special recognition he was appointed as 'Associate Fellow' at the Centre for Global Sustainability Studies (CGSS) in Malaysia.