SNEAK PEEK

THE DBC PROUDLY PRESENTS

Navigating Career Pathways: Insights from Academia, Government & Industry

NUTRITION 2025 • GEM Forum

Join us in Orlando at NUTRITION 2025 as we host Dr. Deirdra Chester, Dr. Mario Ferruzzi, and Dr. Kelly Walsh for an in depth discussion on careers in academia, government, and industry.

Meet Our Panelists

ACADEMIA



Dr. Mario Ferruzzi
Dean, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences at Virginia Tech University

GOVERNMENT



Dr. Deidra Chester
Director, Office of the Chief Scientist at the United States Department of Agriculture

INDUSTRY



Dr. Kelly Walsh
Director, Science Platforms & Nutrition Science at Reckitt

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JUNE 1, 2025 4PM - 5PM

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Dr. Mario Ferruzzi

Dean, College of Agriculture & Life Sciences
Virginia Tech University

ACADEMIA

Essential Skills

From your perspective, what are the most valuable/critical skills, technical and interpersonal, needed to thrive in academia/industry/government, especially for those starting out?

A high level of technical acumen in the specified discipline is, of course, a baseline! However, skills that translate across all three include: eye for talent recruitment and development, technical and "social" problem solving, project management, intellectual and emotional adaptability, ability for extreme focus, patience, and finally, courage.

Are there any skills you wish you had developed earlier in your career?

Patience and team building for sure. I was fortunate to have formal training in project management early in my career in industry and it was an advantage in academia. However, nobody trains you in talent identification and team building which is critical as an early career faculty member to avoid major issues.

Work-Life Balance & Values

How do you balance work and personal life in your role?

I'm a classical "work in progress," and I am blessed with a strong family and wonderful patient spouse who is as much a type A career wise as I am. So, we can relate well AND we focus on quality time for family when we have it. We certainly focus more on the integration of work with life as we have moved along in our careers in a way that allows for balance for family but a commitment for career progress. That includes ensuring we have strong teams at work to support us and ensure there is continuity of our professional lives when we do take the time for family.

How aligned is your current job with your personal values or interests in nutrition?

My current role as Dean of the College of Agriculture allows me to integrate agriculture, food and nutrition at a higher level and moves me from basic to applied, from farm to bench to clinic to communities. My role now is much more about building, refining and enabling a true vision across these disciplines and to mentor the next generation of scientist, educators and extension professionals so that we can advance these concepts to practice with our stakeholders across the Commonwealth.



Dr. Kelly Walsh

Director, Science Platforms & Nutrition Science
Reckitt

INDUSTRY

Essential Skills

From your perspective, what are the most valuable/critical skills, technical and interpersonal, needed to thrive in academia/industry/government, especially for those starting out?

To thrive in industry, scientists need a strong foundation in technical research skills tailored to their sector. Equally important are interpersonal skills such as collaboration, communication, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. Success in industry is driven in part by a commitment to continuous learning, resilience, and the ability to navigate complex, team-oriented environments.

Are there any skills you wish you had developed earlier in your career?

I felt well-prepared stepping into my scientific career, confident in my technical training and research skills. Over time, I realized I was missing a key piece of the bigger picture: the business side of science. That realization led me to pursue an executive MBA, and one of the most valuable lessons I took away from that was the time value of money. I remember learning about it in an undergraduate finance class, but it didn't truly resonate with me until I saw how deeply it influences decision making in the real world. Looking back, I wish I had appreciated its importance sooner. It would have shaped how I approached both my career and personal goals.

Work-Life Balance & Values

How do you balance work and personal life in your role?

Family has always been my top priority. That said, there are inevitably moments when work and personal life intersect. I've never hesitated to sacrifice sleep or personal time to be present for my family. At the same time, my family understands the demands of a professional career and has been a constant source of support throughout my journey. I'm also not afraid to ask for help when things become overwhelming. I make it a point to always surround myself with incredible people who share a spirit of mutual care and support.

How aligned is your current job with your personal values or interests in nutrition?

I feel incredibly fortunate to have worked alongside such a remarkable team of dedicated scientists, all united by a shared sense of nutritional purpose. We are entrusted with the profound responsibility of developing products that not only support healthy growth and development, but also save lives. One of the most powerful moments in my career was when a teary-eyed mother sitting at her baby's bedside in the NICU, thanked me for developing a product that saved her baby's life. That moment will stay with me forever.



Dr. Deidra Chester

Director, Office of the Chief Scientist
United States Deparment of Agriculture

GOVERNMENT

Essential Skills

From your perspective, what are the most valuable/critical skills, technical and interpersonal, needed to thrive in academia/industry/government, especially for those starting out?

To thrive in government, it's essential to understand how government works and have a deep expertise in your field, as you're often helping shape priorities. Equally important are soft skills like clear communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and resilience, especially in an environment where change is constant.

Are there any skills you wish you had developed earlier in your career?

I wish I had developed soft skills earlier, especially communications earlier on. In government, so much relies on clear, effective writing. Resilience is another critical skill, given how often priorities shift. Being adaptable has helped me navigate change and stay focused on the bigger mission.

Work-Life Balance & Values

How do you balance work and personal life in your role?

I'm clear that family comes first. Keeping that as my foundation helps me stay grounded and better manage the balance between work and personal life.

How aligned is your current job with your personal values or interests in nutrition?

My current job aligns with my personal values and interests because I'm both a servant leader and a public servant. My role is to help ensure the American public has access to food, fiber, and the best nutrition guidance. This reflects my deep commitment to helping others live healthier lives.