

2017 Mentoring Award Recipient Francesca Cotrufo, PhD

Nominator: Dr. Mary Stromberger, Profession, Soil Microbiology and Associate Dean of the Graduate School, Colorado State University



Francesca is a professor in the Department of Soil and Crop Sciences at Colorado State University. She is a soil ecologist and biogeochemist in the field of litter decomposition and soil organic matter C and N dynamics.

Dr. Cotrufo is the ideal mentor for women in soil science: she is an incredibly successful research scientist; she is equally passionate about student learning and student success, and she is a dedicated mentor who strives to support and promote women in soil science, from K-16 to graduate school to the profession.

Francesca has mentored over 40 women to be successful students, post-doctorates, research scientists, faculty, and teachers.

Her mentoring philosophy includes, in part, the following:

"Mentoring is my greatest passion. I believe that effective mentoring brings the most profound and lasting benefits to science and society, and I continuously strive to improve mine.

I firmly believe that each person who has the motivation and talent to become a scientist should have the right to become one, and find support along the way, independent of gender or any other "distinguisher" we commonly apply to people. Many girls in the US and around the world still need to have their self-confidence reinforced and to identify with a role model to find the determination to pursue a career in science. I try my best to serve as a role model for women in science, through a variety of approaches: from my every day interactions with the many women scientists at different stages of their career I have had the pleasure to work with, to working in schools with teachers and girls, or joining networks and participating in specific events.

I hope to make an impact on my advisees by transferring a passion for research, and imparting the importance of a career in agricultural and environmental science to humanity, while also demonstrating with my own experience that this career is feasible and can be pursued by a woman, who is also a mother and a wife with a fulfilling personal life."

Perhaps the incredible impact Francesca has made can best be summarized by examples from a few of her mentees:

"Francesca is the ideal mentor and her guidance has been fundamental to my personal and professional growth as an early career scientist...She has provided the ultimate mentoring example that I will continue to use as I begin to mentor my own students." Dr. Megan Machmuller, USDA Postdoctoral Fellow

"She has taken the time to get to know me as a person, rather than only focusing on my research and career trajectory. In this, she has helped me better understand myself, as a scientist, as a woman in this field, and really just as a person in the world."--Yamina Pressler, PhD student

In closing, Dr. Cotrufo has dedicated her life to sharing her success with other women, and helping women achieve their own successes.

On behalf of the Women in Science committee, I am honored to present her with this Mentoring Award.