



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Davis College

Plant & Soil Science™

Davis College of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources

Department of Plant and Soil Science

M.S. 2122

Lubbock, TX 79409-2122

May 15, 2024

Dear Selection Committee,

With the advent of the outreach and engagement award in 2024, the competition will be fierce, with leaders from across the college, many of whom have won several college awards already, submitted. One of our college leaders in **outreach and engagement** is Dr. Vikram Baliga, an assistant professor of practice in PSS who carries the mantle in PSS. I think you will find him competitive for this award, and I highly recommend him.

Dr. Baliga is perhaps the most recognizable face in PSS, having served as an extension agent prior to joining our department. He has expanded his outreach and engagement roles upon arrival, accomplishing several unique accomplishments that have made Davis College more visible. I will briefly describe his recent accomplishments in both outreach and engagement for your consideration.

Outreach

In 2023, Vikram published a book, [*Plants to the Rescue!: The Plants, Trees, and Fungi That Are Solving Some of the World's Biggest Problems*](#), designed to highlight unique ways that plants benefit us. In 2023, he also surpassed 200,000 downloads for the popular [*Planthropology*](#) Podcast, and he recently released his 100th episode. He co-hosted the weekly NPR radio show and podcast, [*In The Grow*](#), in collaboration with Texas Tech Public Media throughout 2023. He was also the subject of a feature spread titled "From Soil to Sky" in Volume 4 of Texas Tech's *Evermore Magazine* and contributed primary content to three front page stories in *The Lubbock Avalanche Journal*.

Engagement

Vikram has actively involved himself in the community, overseeing the semiannual [horticulture plant sale](#), an event that brings community members to the horticulture greenhouse complex to provide plants, gardening tips, and resources to help make flower and vegetable gardens in Lubbock successful. Vikram and other leaders in the department train horticulture students in marketing, product service, and logistics to welcome more than 500 people to the sale each April and October. Dr. Baliga and Dr. Thomas oversee PSS 1411, the gateway class into Plant and Soil Science. In 2023, they taught 800 students and were recognized with outstanding evaluations. In addition, he volunteers time at the Agri-Stem campus and other local high schools to train and recruit prospective Texas Tech students.

Dr. Baliga exemplifies the outreach and engagement missions of Davis College and Texas Tech, and we are proud to have him in our department.

Respectfully,

Glen L. Ritchie, Ph.D.

Chair, Department of Plant and Soil Science