



## **Roberto Maisonnave (1970-Present)**

**Nutrient Management Specialist and  
Soil Scientist**

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*“At some point, you have to prove why you are here.” Roberto Maisonnave, 2004.*

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### **Early Life**

Roberto Maisonnave was born and raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina. His mother, Dina, was a homemaker and his father, Jorge, was an accounting manager in a large automotive company. Throughout his childhood, Maisonnave spent a great deal of time tending to his father's farm which provided him an early connection with agriculture.

### **Education**

This appreciation of agriculture led Maisonnave to enroll as an undergraduate student in the Agronomy College in Argentina. As a student, Maisonnave took a class titled, “American Socio-cultural Systems: hunters and fruit collectors.” He performed well in the class and impressed his professor who later invited him to join his research group which had been awarded a fellowship from *Earth Watch*, an American environmental organization, to finance his studies. His research team traveled to the Paraguay-Bolivia-Brazil frontier and spent a month in a native village close to the Paraguayan town of Bahia Negra. The natives of this group are called the Chamacocos and Maisonnave led the evaluation of their potential to incorporate agricultural activities at the family and community level. Although this research project was not a required component of Maisonnave's concentration program, his participation with this group significantly added to the richness of his undergraduate experience.

Maisonnave wrote his undergraduate thesis on arsenic water pollution in rural areas, which helped to gain him much recognition. This recognition opened doors for many future opportunities. He received a bachelor's degree in agricultural engineering in 1998.

After Maisonnave received his bachelor's degree, he began his graduate studies at the University of Buenos Aires. While studying for his master's degree, Maisonnave worked as a teaching assistant. This position cultivated his interest in the environmental field. As a teaching assistant, Maisonnave did presentations at the University of Buenos and was in charge of water, soil and

sludge samples. Maisonnave held this position from 1998 to 2002. In 2002, he completed a master's degree in environmental science.

Maisonnave's work as a teaching assistant and a young researcher helped him to advance in his career because of the experience he gained and the contacts that he made. While working towards his master's degree, he studied feed yards, an alternative to grazing cows where the cattle are put into small pens. This causes a serious environmental impact on surface and ground waters and Maisonnave was the first person to study this in Argentina. Because of his work on this topic, the World Bank and the Argentina government awarded him a fellowship. This work also helped him to secure a three-month internship with Texas A & M University.

Upon completing his internship with Texas A & M, Maisonnave returned to Argentina to finish his master's degree and complete the necessary research for his dissertation. He applied and was accepted to a four year Ph.D. fellowship program with the University of Buenos Aires. Texas A & M then offered him a Ph.D. fellowship as well. While deciding which university to attend, a friend at Texas A&M notified him that an agribusiness firm was looking for someone with his work and research experiences. Ultimately, Maisonnave chose the position with agribusiness firm because he felt that the experience that he would gain would best advance his career.

## **Career**

The agribusiness firm is one the largest producers of pigs with one million pigs produced annually. Maisonnave is currently working as a nutrient management specialist and environmental soil scientist at Guymon, Oklahoma. He is responsible for sites located in Kansas, Colorado and Texas as well and is in charge of a state-of-the-art hog manure waste treatment system. The manure is used as organic fertilizer for crops and it is given to farmers so that they can save money on commercial fertilizers. He is also the soil scientist of the company and works closely with management plants.

## **Importance of Mentoring to Career**

He credits his mentor, Dr. John Sweeten of Texas A & M University, with being a great influence on him throughout his endeavors. Sweeten hosted him when he came from Argentina, recommended him for his current position, and has always supported Maisonnave's hard work and dreams. Dr. Alicia Fabrizio de Iorio with the Chemistry Lab at University of Buenos Aires was also the first person that had introduced Maisonnave to the environmental sciences world and is still a great support to every life project he has.

Maisonnave knows the importance of being a mentor as well. He is familiar with the difficulties associated with working in a foreign country, so he mentors individuals hired to raise the pigs from countries such as Mexico and Peru. He helps them with their transition from their respective countries to the United States by giving them advice on how to secure loans for cars and homes. He also shows them how to work with the corporation and he teaches them about environmental issues.

## **Challenges**

Maisonnave has been fortunate enough to have many great opportunities, but he has not always been able to seize all of them. One of Maisonnave's most difficult decisions was to turn down the doctoral fellowship from the University of Buenos Aires. Sixteen hundred people applied for the fellowship; only 50 people were selected. He was grateful that he got his current position, but at the same time he was frustrated that he had to close that door for the rest of his life. He was not sure if he would be successful in his new position in the corporate world.

## **Highlights**

Improvement is essential and Maisonnave feels that there is always room to improve oneself. He is extremely proud of the challenge that his current position provides. He has worked for two years in his capacity as a nutrient management specialist and environmental soil scientist. Both he and the company feel that he is a perfect match.

Maisonnave is also proud of the level of education that he has received from the University of Buenos Aires. There are many people in Argentina who do not have the funds to pursue an education, nor do they have access to the opportunities that he has had; this makes him feel very fortunate.

He has been able to make his hard work pay off. Maisonnave believes that his most significant achievement has been his ability to succeed in the corporate world despite the barriers that he has faced. It has been difficult for him to make the transition from academia to the corporate world especially because of the language and cultural differences that he has had to overcome. However, all of these things have enriched his experience.

## **Advice to Young Professionals**

Maisonnave advises minorities who are considering a career in the environmental field to try to understand and be knowledgeable of the regulations of whatever program they would like to be a part of. He also notes that people probably expect more out of him because he is a minority. He says, "At some point, you need to prove why you are here."

*This interview was conducted in 2015.*