

Young Gifted and STEM Profile – Who Am I?

Navaratnam Partheeban – UK

1. Who are you and what is your STEM Superpower?

My name is Navaratnam Partheeban and I am a Farm Animal Veterinary Surgeon. My STEM superpower is I can help support the dairy industry from on the farm to advising on wider policy and research in the sector, which benefits everyone being able to enjoy good quality and nutritious dairy products.

2. When did you first realise you were passionate about your STEM subject or field?

When I was 7, I spent time with my uncle who was a small animal vet in East London. I enjoyed science and animals as a child. The variety of the job and working in a clinic was exciting and inspired me to want to be a vet. It was only when I spent a few weeks on a farm before applying for vet school that my passion for farm animals started.

3. Describe the route you took, which lead from finishing your GCSEs until now.

After finishing my GCSE's, I did my A levels in Biology, Chemistry and Physics. I completed a degree in Zoology at Manchester University and then studied Veterinary Medicine at Edinburgh University. Following this I went to work as a farm vet in Mid-Wales mainly with sheep. My passion for cows grew and so I worked in a few other farm practices before working in a large dairy veterinary practice. I joined a French pharmaceutical company, where I was the **Veterinary Technical Manager** for the dairy cow and pig portfolio in the UK and Ireland.

Teaching had always interested me and an opportunity to become a **Senior Lecturer at the Royal Agricultural University** came up which I accepted. As part of my job, I managed the health and welfare of the university farms, taught students about livestock production and conducted research into dairy production, which took me to many places around the world. While working, I have completed a few post graduate qualifications in *cattle health, welfare and management*.

I am now the **U.K. Veterinary Dairy Technical Specialist** for a large American animal health company. In my day to day role, I get to visit many dairy farmers across the UK, providing advice to keep their animals healthy and produce more milk. I am also involved with setting up research studies and understanding financial and product markets.

4. If you had to study/focus on ONE STEM area for the rest of your career what would it be and why?

Dairy Cow production. It is one of the biggest areas in agriculture and a sector with lots of new technology and information being developed. Much of the world depends on milk, so as a vet, you can make a difference. There are many aspects one can get involved in as a vet in dairy, such as genetics, clinical work, building design, milk quality, research, reproduction, nutrition, policy and research for example.

5. What do you enjoy most about your day to day role?

In my studies, I enjoyed learning the different subjects around animal health. This included anatomy and physiology, but also behaviour, welfare, farming and surgery for example.

In my current role, I enjoy talking to people such as farmers, nutritionists and vets, engaging in a subject that I enjoy. My role allows me to be involved with veterinary advice but also marketing, sales, research and education. This is what gives the job variety and makes it enjoyable.



Navaratnam meeting with colleagues on the Dairy farm

6. Who would name as your main STEMspiration and why?

My uncle is a large inspiration. Having studied veterinary medicine abroad, he taught me about hard work and overcoming barriers which he had to face working in the U.K. Although people in my community would have preferred me to study human medicine, he inspired me to follow my dream. There are very few role models to follow in my sector and it is difficult to relate to the traditional veterinary and agricultural role models, so his support was very important to me.

7. Outside of STEM, what are your other hobbies?

I am passionate about increasing diversity and inclusion in veterinary medicine and agriculture. A colleague and I co-founded **British Veterinary Ethnicity and**

Diversity Society (BVEDS) to help celebrate, promote and support people in veterinary medicine regarding race and ethnicity. We aim to reach out to people considering this career, studying at vet school and practicing vets.

Inner City farms are also important to me, so I support St Werburgh's City Farm as a Veterinary trustee. Inner City Farms are a great place to get some animal contact in urban environments.

Finally, I am passionate about sport and follow Liverpool football, Bath rugby and Sri Lanka cricket when I can.

8. Lastly, if you could give our Young Gifted and STEM readers one piece of advice, what would it be?

Don't give up and follow your passion. I know this is a common saying but it is true. If anything, I am living proof. Coming from a non-traditional background and without many of the typical privileges that vet students generally have, it was tough, but I made it. There are always going to be barriers and doubters, but don't let that stop you.

