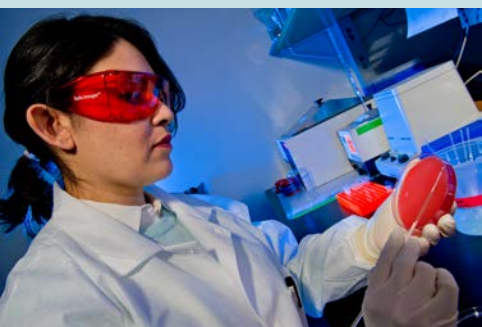




Laboratory Leadership Service (LLS)

Laboratory Leaders Up Close

Alexandra Mercante, PhD



“Being an LLS fellow at the front lines of public health at CDC has been a rewarding opportunity to expand my training as a microbiologist while positively impacting people’s lives.”

—Alexandra Mercante, PhD,
LLS Class of 2015



LLS fellow, Dr. Mercante, investigating an outbreak of *E. coli* O157 at a goat farm in rural Connecticut.

As a microbiologist from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, I have always been interested in helping people live healthy lives and understanding how bacteria cause disease. While I was completing my post-doctoral training at CDC in the Tuberculosis Laboratory Branch, I discovered the Laboratory Leadership Service (LLS) program and decided it would be the perfect next step for my career.



Alexandra Mercante, PhD, LLS fellow in the Enteric Diseases Laboratory Branch, has pursued applied public health laboratory research with an emphasis on laboratory safety and quality management systems.

In 2015, I became an LLS fellow in CDC’s Enteric Diseases Laboratory Branch, where I conduct applied public health laboratory research with an emphasis on lab safety and quality management systems. One of the most exciting parts of my LLS experience so far was when I was a part of a CDC Epi-Aid team that assisted with an *E. coli* O157 outbreak investigation among visitors to a goat farm in rural Connecticut. A total of 50 confirmed cases of *E. coli* infection were associated with the outbreak, including 47 with an epidemiologic link to the goat farm. We obtained 61 environmental samples; among these, 28 (46%) yielded *E. coli* O157. Of the 17 samples collected from goats, 16 yielded *E. coli* O157. Through the Epi-Aid, we were able to provide technical assistance to the Connecticut Department of Public Health in responding to this urgent public health problem, and our support guided the development of public health recommendations to prevent future *E. coli* O157 outbreaks.

I have also led a variety of projects, including the implementation of holistic biorisk management into our laboratory safety system. In addition, I am working toward increased integration of laboratory quality and safety activities across my branch.

Being an LLS fellow at the front lines of public health at CDC has allowed me the opportunity to pursue my passions as a microbiologist and answer scientific questions that enhance public health and have a positive impact on people’s lives.

Learn more about LLS at www.cdc.gov/lls

Center for Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services (CSELS)
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