Oral Awardees:

1st Place – James Heilig, Michigan State University

Jim is a Ph.D. candidate in Plant Breeding, Genetics, and Biotechnology at Michigan State University in the Plant, Soil, and Microbial Sciences Department. He works in Dr. James D. Kelly's lab and anticipates graduating in summer 2015. Born and raised in Michigan, Jim received his B.S. degree in Horticulture from MSU. After working as a state agriculture inspector, he returned to MSU to pursue his M.S. in Plant Breeding, Genetics, and Biotechnology. Jim's graduate work has focused on symbiotic nitrogen fixation (SNF) in common bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris*). He is working with a RIL population derived from the black beans 'Puebla 152' and 'Zorro' to find QTLs associated with SNF traits to find markers useful for selection of advanced breeding lines with enhanced SNF characteristics. The population has been phenotyped in both the greenhouse and in the field in Michigan and Puerto Rico. Additionally, Jim has conducted on farm trials to evaluate dry beans grown under organic production systems and investigate the impact of SNF on productivity.

2nd Place – Kathleen Russell, University of Kentucky

Kathleen Russell is a Ph.D. candidate in Integrated Plant and Soil Sciences with a focus on Plant Breeding and is advised by Dr. David Van Sanford at the University of Kentucky. Her anticipated graduation is May 2016. She received her B.S. in Natural Resource Management (2004) and M.S. in Entomology (2007) from the University of Kentucky and afterwards spent some time doing field research with a private environmental consulting firm. Kathleen's graduate research is focused on understanding the effects of heat stress on nitrogen use efficiency in soft red winter wheat varieties adapted to the Southeastern United States and how to better screen for tolerance in the field for improved breeding strategies.

3rd Place – Jozer Mangandi, University of Florida

Jozer Mangandi is a PhD candidate in Horticultural Sciences at the University of Florida, advised by Drs. Vance Whitaker and Natalia Peres. He is originally from El Salvador, earning his B.S. in Agricultural Science and Production from the Pan-American Agricultural University "Zamorano", Honduras in 2005. He joined the University of Florida's Gulf Coast Research and Education Center in 2006, pursuing research on disease resistance on strawberries and ornamentals. He earned an M.S in Horticultural Sciences from University of Florida in 2010 and expects to complete his Ph.D. in December, 2015. His dissertation research is part of a concerted breeding effort to increase disease resistance in UF strawberry cultivars. Specifically, he is uncovering the inheritance of resistance to two strawberry crown rot pathogens *(Phytophthora cactorum* and *Colletotrichum gloeosporioides*), identifying and validating QTL associated with high levels of resistance. After graduation he will pursue his goal of a career in the plant breeding industry, with a strong focus on disease resistance traits.

Poster Awardees:

1st Place – David Eickholt, North Carolina State University

David P. Eickholt is a current PhD student at North Carolina State University working with Dr. Thomas E. Carter Jr. in the USDA-ARS Soybean Nitrogen Fixation Unit. David grew up on a multi-generational farm in Chesaning, Michigan with his parents and sister. Prior to beginning his graduate work at NCSU, David completed his undergraduate in the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences at Michigan State University. He did his masters work in tobacco breeding at NCSU as a Monsanto Fellow under the direction of Dr. Ramsey Lewis. David is currently focusing on improving soybean yield through the inclusion of genetic diversity from *Glycine soja* for his doctoral work. He was awarded a fellowship from the United Soybean Board to pursue this research. In his free time, David enjoys fishing, reading, welding, and cheering on the Spartans.

2nd Place – Andrea Varella, Montana State University

Andrea Varella is a PhD candidate in the Department of Plant Sciences & Plant Pathology, Montana State University, where she works under the supervision of Dr. Luther Talbert and Dr. David Weaver. Her primary research interests are plant resistance to insect pests, plant breeding and genetics. Currently, she studies the genetic basis of wheat resistance to the wheat stem sawfly. Before coming to the US, she received a BS degree in Biological Sciences and a Masters degree in Agricultural Entomology, both at São Paulo State University, Brazil. Her intended career focus is to be part of a multi-disciplinary team of researchers in a crop breeding and plant resistance research and development center.

3rd Place – Paul Sandefur, Washington State University

Paul Sandefur is now a Ph.D. candidate in the Horticulture Department at Washington State University, Pullman under Dr. Cameron Peace. His research focus is on the development of apple, peach, and sweet cherry DNA tests for routine prediction of fruit quality traits in fruit breeding programs. Paul was born in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin and grew up in Fayetteville, Arkansas. He received his B.S. in 2009 and M.S. in 2011 from the University of Arkansas studying Horticulture. Paul is working toward a dream career as a fruit breeder.