

FARM MAGAZINE: Japan TV focuses on 'mad cow' research by Claflin professor

By [LEE HENDREN](#), T&D Staff Writer

International attention focused on Orangeburg as a film crew from one of Japan's leading broadcasters, NHK, visited Claflin University on Oct. 6 to interview Dr. Omar Bagasra.

Bagasra, who holds both a Ph.D. and a medical degree, is director of the South Carolina Center for Biotechnology and professor of biology at Claflin University in Orangeburg.

He's a virologist and research scientist who has received tens of millions of dollars in grants over the course of his academic career.

Bagasra is gaining attention from the World Health Organization and other prominent entities for his research into "mad cow" disease, HIV/AIDS and prostate cancer.

Mad cow disease is formally called bovine spongiform encephalopathy or BSE. People who eat tainted beef can get a similar, rare but fatal, disease called variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease.

The four-member Japanese TV crew was especially interested that Bagasra's research — which is continuing — has led him to some hypotheses that are at variance with some experts at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Born in India and reared in Pakistan with 11 siblings, Bagasra joined the army as a medical corpsman at the age of 16.

He spent two years in religious study at a monastery before enrolling in the University of Karachi and earning his bachelor's degree in microbiology and his master's in biochemistry.

In 1972 he came to the United States and worked in road construction for a while — improving his use of English, his seventh language — before enrolling at the University of Louisville, Ky. He graduated with his Ph.D. in microbiology and immunology in 1979 and joined the faculty of Hahnemann University.

He began researching the HIV and AIDS virus in 1981 — the year in which the first scientific study of the virus was released — and has made significant, recognized contributions to the global understanding of the nature of the deadly virus.

Because he had been born and educated overseas, Bagasra encountered difficulty in gaining admission to a medical school in the United States.

However, he was accepted at the Universidad Autonoma in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, on the other side of the border from El Paso, Texas. He completed his clinical training at Temple University.

At Claflin, Bagasra has held several university professorships, authored numerous articles, books, book chapters and abstracts. He has conducted more than 200 significant workshops, symposia and lectures throughout the world.



A camera man from NHK, a leading Japanese broadcaster, films Claflin University Professor Dr. Omar Bagasra, seated, and Lab Manager Sajid Saleem, background, for a news segment that is to air on Japanese TV. LARRY HARDY/T&D

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