

SOUTH CENTRAL FLORIDA LIFE

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Internationally acclaimed scientist to lead Everglades research



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**By Lourdes Mederos
UF/IFAS**

BELLE GLADE — Samira Daroub, an internationally acclaimed soil and water scientist and professor, has been named director of the UF/IFAS Everglades Research & Education Center (EREC).

Daroub becomes the second woman in the history of the 100-year-old center to take the helm. Located in Belle Glade the center’s campus includes offices, laboratories, greenhouses, a 700-acre research farm, and residential dormitories and housing for graduate students and visiting scientists, all in the heart of the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA).

“Dr. Daroub has impressed me every time I’ve gone to Belle Glade to visit with her,” said J. Scott Angle, UF senior vice president of agriculture and natural resources and leader of UF/IFAS. “I’ve also been impressed at every visit by what stakeholders, faculty, staff and community leaders say about her first-rate science and her leadership. It’s critical that we have such a trusted leader to navigate complex water quality challenges in this region.”

Daroub arrived at EREC in 2000 as an assistant professor and later became a professor and then associate center director at the center. Following retirement of then director, Greg Nuessly, Daroub served as interim director. She was a natural choice for the permanent position, said Angle.

Daroub now leads a team of nine faculty members and 80 graduate students, post-doctoral associates and staff at UF/IFAS EREC. Together they provide support for the EAA’s dynamic, agriculturally diverse region, which includes sugarcane, rice, commercial sod, and winter vegetables like sweet corn and leafy greens. Research at EREC covers a wide range of fields including agronomy, entomology and nematology, horticultural sciences, plant pathology, and soil

and water sciences. The area's growers are also supported by regional Extension agents based at EREC and at other UF/IFAS Extension offices in the EAA.

“It has been a privilege to serve the EAA community in South Florida for the last 21 years. I am excited to be in this role to lead the EREC setting and achieving goals and priorities to serve our community and educate the new generation of scientists,” said Daroub. “As center director, I will actively work with stakeholders and faculty to be responsive and address current and emergent issues in south Florida. I will strive to provide an inclusive supportive environment for personnel to achieve their potential and career goals.”

Among her first set of priorities are to:

- Conduct needs assessments and set priorities for critical hires at the center with faculty, stakeholders and administration to address current and emerging critical research issues.
- Identify areas of growth in research, Extension and teaching for the center through collaboration among different disciplines, departments and other research centers.
- Facilitate professional development of faculty, students and interns. Focus on student education, wellbeing and mentoring. Create an inclusive supportive environment for everyone at the center to feel valued and appreciated.
- Engage stakeholders and foster strong linkages with growers and community at large.

For Daroub, the beginnings of her internationally acclaimed career in soil and water sciences took shape as an undergraduate in her hometown of Beirut, Lebanon.

“It is all due to the power of teachers and mentoring and it goes back to my first semester in college when I took a soil science class,” said Daroub. “The instructor took his time to teach each lesson. He showed how it had practical application, and it was through his mentorship and others that I gained a love for this applied science.”

Daroub earned a bachelor's degree in agriculture and a diploma in agricultural engineering from The American University of Beirut in Lebanon. She later

obtained her master's in soil sciences there. For her Ph.D., she attended Michigan State University on a full scholarship awarded by the non-profit Hariri Foundation. Her mentors in these institutions shaped the scientist and mentor she is today.

Daroub took that life lesson to heart and has paid that support forward ever since.