

Puerto Rican Professor Selected as USDA Agricultural Research Service Scholar ^[1]

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Dr. Elizabeth Padilla Crespo is part of the Department of Science and Technology at the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico in Aguadilla. (Supplied)

The collaborations that Dr. Elizabeth Padilla Crespo formed with researchers from the federal Department of Agriculture will allow her to take her work "to the next level".

A research professor from the Aguadilla campus of the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico was the only Puerto Rican chosen, along with seven other U.S. researchers, by the federal Department of Agriculture (USDA) to participate as a Science Fellow in the 2023 Kika de la Garza Fellowship Program.

As a Science Fellow, Dr. Elizabeth Padilla Crespo was paired with two laboratories in Oxford, Mississippi, to learn new methods of chemical synthesis and analysis. The scientist commented that the techniques she observed at the USDA National Sedimentation Laboratory and the USDA Natural Products Utilization Research were of high value to her own research.

"In the sedimentation laboratory I learned about water quality tests and physicochemical phenomena of sediments; very relevant topics given the landslides that occur in Puerto Rico and coastal erosion," explained Padilla Crespo, who is an environmental microbiologist.

In the Natural Products laboratory, the professor learned different methods for the extraction of active ingredients such as bioinsecticides and toxicity bioassays. "I have a research that is focused on the identification of natural products (chemicals) with antimicrobial capabilities, so this part was crucial for me," the researcher abounded.

Padilla Crespo met the director of the Natural Products laboratory, Charles Cantrell, and other researchers who agreed to collaborate in the subsequent analysis of her samples, which require advanced instrumentation.

"That's very exciting, as this will help me take this project to the next level," Padilla Crespo said.

Inter-American University President Rafael Ramirez Rivera highlighted the impact the professor's experience will have on her research and teaching. "It fills us with pride and enthusiasm to see our faculty members in field experiences that nourish them with knowledge to pass on to their students," Ramirez said.

Padilla Crespo was chosen first in a group of 30 participants, faculty members from universities across the United States and Puerto Rico, where they spent a week with leaders from different USDA agencies in the Washington, D.C. area. There they discussed national and regional issues, as well as policy formulation and research.

After that week-long session with the 30 participants, eight science fellows were chosen to work for an additional week collaborating with top USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists. Dr. Padilla Crespo was chosen from this exclusive group of eight participants.

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