

## Joint interview of Yasmin Muhammed & Ezzudeen Eisawi, laureates of the Best Thesis Award 2021 and the Youth Innovation Award 2022

Ezzudeen Eisawi, Yasmin Muhammed

**How was your experience at the CIHEAM MEDFORUM 2022 in the Mediterranean Institute of Chania (Greece)?**

**Yasmin Muhammed:** My experience at the CIHEAM MEDFORUM 2022 (Chania) was unique, eye-opening and informative. I met a wide range of professionals from different fields and learnt about the latest trends in my field. This scientific event allowed me to develop my critical thinking skills and build valuable connections with people working in my field all over the world. Most importantly, it gave me the chance to present my research in front of an international audience and forge new connections that will help me to advance my career in the future.

**Ezzudeen Esaiwi:** During my stay at CIHEAM Chania, I've had the pleasure to meet enthusiastic and excited young researchers and PhD students, who are willing to contribute and make a positive change in the Agrifood sector with fruitful seminars and research ideas.



Yasmin and Ezzudeen at the MEDFORUM 2022 with Plácido Plaza, Maurizio Raeli and George Barouakis

**Can you tell us about your personal background and the reasons why you decided to invest in the world of agri-food research?**

**Yasmin Muhammed:** I decided to invest all my efforts and time in the world of Agri-food research because I believe that food production is one of the main factors that can enhance our world and bring peace and prosperity to everyone, especially in developing countries like my country Egypt. We have to achieve the SDGs by 2030 including Zero Hunger! All of this sparked my interest to continue my journey in the sector. My background is in agriculture and most of my career has focused on organic food. Since completing my undergraduate degree, I have been focusing on gaining additional skills and knowledge so that I can further develop my career in this field. My experience at CIHEAM as a master's student was an invaluable opportunity for me to gain new ideas and insights that are relevant to my work and research. It provided me with invaluable skills that will be important in my career in the future.

**Ezzudeen Esaiwi:** I've had my BSc. in Agronomy and my area of interest is Agrifood sector as well. I chose this field because it deals with every one of us either directly or indirectly; directly with food production and consumption, and indirectly through the whole processing and production of food. In fact, all politicians and decision makers often overlook this sector and leaves it neglected, yet it's very important and crucial. During my studies at CIHEAM Bari, I got a deeper look in the agricultural field as a whole and particularly organic farming, sustainability, regulation and research methodologies.

**Winner of a CIHEAM prize, what will this academic award allow you to do in the future? What are your professional goals?**

**Yasmin Muhammed:** I was very honored to win the prize for best thesis. This academic award will allow me to further my education and add value to my career. I would not have been able to achieve this level of academic success without the support of the course directors and the fantastic team at CIHEAM. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone at CIHEAM for giving me this opportunity to pursue my dreams and I look forward to my future as a researcher in the field of organic food. I'm currently doing my Ph.D. in the field of food science at the University of Bari and I will continue my academic research career until I make a change in the world by changing people's habits and guiding them toward buying healthier. I would also like to get actively involved in international research collaborations and publish my research results in reputable scientific journals.

**Ezzudeen Esaiwi:** My project INSPOT for Biotechnology LLC. Originated from a conversation between me and my partner. We had a discussion about the feasibility to launch a startup in Egypt, I had the practical experience with insects while he had the theoretical knowledge so we decided to work with insects to recycle the organic wastes and produce animal feed. Currently, we have a pilot facility and operation scheme upon which we can start the

commercial production given the proper investment is pumped. Such kind of startups will be very potent in our Mediterranean region, due to the fact that we have suitable climatic conditions, labor and workforce, but also the Mediterranean is considered one of the biodiversity hotspots around the world, so we should harness the native species and explore more of them and how to put them into use.



CIHEAM Bari - Photo credits: CIHEAM

**How do you see the future of the region, in particular in relation to the agri-food sector and which are the necessary tools to ensure positive transitions?**

**Yasmin Muhammed:** I see the future of the agri-food sector in the Mediterranean region as very challenging because most of the countries in the region are suffering from water shortages and face high population growth rates which will cause an increase in the demand for water and food in the coming years. I strongly believe that the issue of food security is crucial for the region, so I hope that governments and researchers can work together to establish sustainable agricultural practices that will help alleviate hunger and poverty in the region. The good point is that we have the tools to build a resilient future and a positive transition. For example, there is great biodiversity in our region that can be nurtured to support an environmentally friendly

and regenerative economy that will improve the lives of millions of people. We can also take advantage of organic agriculture because it uses fewer resources. Other tools could be the adoption of innovative tools and technologies that would help reduce water and energy use in farms and help us become more sustainable in the long run. I personally believe that the success of these strategies will depend on how governments introduce and implement new policies, how they promote sustainable agriculture, and how they educate the public about the importance of these practices. Finally, we need to have a coordinated approach across all sectors to ensure our sustainable development.

**Ezzudeen Esaiwi:** I see the future of Agrifood sector in the Mediterranean region as very promising, yet very challenging, the youth are escaping the agrifood sector to other sectors like industry and technology but with the right set of regulations and policies, and to use the traditional expertise we have, we can orient them back to the agrifood sector.

*[Interview by Audrey Petiot]*

This biennial forum was organized by the Department of Horticultural Genetics and Biotechnology of CIHEAM Chania, supported by the General Secretariat and the other 3 institutes.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations ([FAO](#)), the Union for the Mediterranean ([UfM](#)) and the European Forest Institute ([EFI](#)), partners of the MedForum, were also involved.

During three days, the young participants had the opportunity to exchange with high-level, internationally recognized scientists and to learn more about recent research that may affect **agri-food production, rural development, and sustainability** in the Mediterranean basin.

## RESEARCH AND SCIENCE FOR AGRI-FOOD SYSTEMS AFFECTED BY CRISES

In view of current events, the theme of this year's conference was "Mediterranean agriculture and food systems in the context of climate change and the agri-food crisis". More than 70 studies were presented during the three days by their respective authors, from countries in the Euro-Mediterranean area and beyond. Four thematic sessions marked the three days of meetings and debates:

- Tools and strategies to improve the **efficiency, nutritional value, health and sustainability of agri-food systems**
- Agricultural and agroforestry **innovations and technologies**
- **Genetic resources, pest management and water use** for sustainable production and climate change resilience
- **Biotechnological approaches** to increase crop productivity



The 4th edition of the Mediterranean Forum for Doctoral Students and Young Researchers (MedForum) took place at the [CIHEAM Chania Conference Centre](#) from 4 to 7 December in the framework of the CIHEAM [60th anniversary celebrations](#).