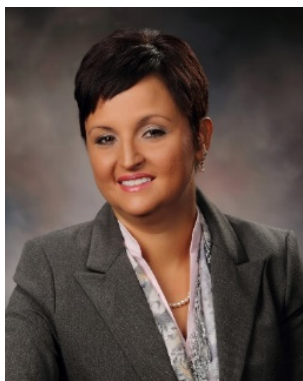




### Haitian Soils Cochran Fellowship Training a Cooperative Effort in Soil Survey Region ...Page 5



Happy fall NOPHNRCSE members,

Our Council has been busy the last couple of months working on our next training series. We are in the process of planning of a joint training session with NEDC the week of March 12, 2017, in Grapevine (Dallas area), Texas (same place as last year). Some potential trainings we are looking to offer are:

- Managing for Excellence
- Supervising for Excellence
- Economics of Conservation Planning
- Area wide planning
- Appropriations law

Once the NEDC training session is over, we are putting together a technical training that will cover engineering and conservation planning tools, soil health, civil rights topics and others. Also WIN (Women in NRCS) and APIO (Asian Pacific Islander Organization) are looking into the possibility of partnering with us. I will encourage you--if you need take one of the trainings mentioned above, please be sure to include them on your IDP. This way your supervisor and NEDC knows of the need for us to provide this training. Also we are looking for individuals that will like to be part of the planning committee. Please look at Bianca's message in this edition of La Voz for more information.

The week of September 26, 2016, I had the honor and privilege to participate on two USDA student recruitment event at the Inter American University in Aguadilla, PR and University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez Campus. This recruitment event made history for NRCS since it is the first time we hosted a recruitment event at Inter American University. Also it was the first time that we are recruiting students on the Business Administration positions



Valley Ranching Family See Benefits in Conservation Efforts...Page 3



Employment & Internship ON-SITE Application Acceptance Event...Page 1-2



Haitian Soils Cochran Fellowship Training a Cooperative Effort in Soil Survey Region...Page 7

at both universities. During the 4 day events we were able to collect over 300 applications to fill about 42 positions within NRCS. I want to thank Bianca Diaz for her amazing job coordinating these two events with Edwin Almodovar and Tanya Robles and to the amazing support team of NRCS employees in PR and in the states for making these events very successful.

Last but not least, in the next few weeks we will be accepting nominations for our next vacant positions, one of them NOPHNRCSE President. Please consider stepping in for any of the vacant positions so you can help keep the organization running. Should you have questions regarding any of the positions please contact me, Michael Margo, or Bianca Diaz.

Here's wishing everyone a wonderful holiday season and I am looking forward to seeing you all in March.

Astrid Martinez  
President

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**Save the Date! NOPHNRCSE 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Leadership Training Conference at Grapevine, TX on the week of March 13-18, 2017. By: Bianca Díaz**

This past October the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (NOPHNRCSE) joined with NRCS and NEDC to perform trainings for employee development. Now we are working on putting together our 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Leadership Training Conference on March 17-18, 2017 where new opportunities for employee development will be offered. If you are interested in helping out and participate on any of the following committees below please let me know. More information regarding the details of the conference will be sent out soon with information on trainings and presentations available as well as how to register.

Looking forward to a great conference!

NOPHNRCSE Committees:

1. Registration
2. Agenda
3. Moderators
4. Awards Luncheon
5. Scholarship/Auction Night
6. Communications

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## South Central Region

### Conservation Efforts Provide Benefits to Valley Ranching Family

By Melissa Blair, NRCS Public Affairs Specialist



For Martin Pena II and his wife Cristal, owners of the 606 Ranch LLC. in Hidalgo County, the hands-on technical assistance provided through the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) not only proved to be a time of learning for the young couple, but also yielded positive benefits for them and their ranch.

Martin and Cristal didn't grow up on a farm or ranch, but they wanted horses to ride and enjoy, so they bought a ranch in Donna. They started raising horse quality hay to feed their livestock and to sell. They went through the "school of hard knocks" as Martin put it, learning from others, asking questions and seeking out resources to help with their goals of improving the ranch. Farmers who had come to see Pena about his hay at the ranch, told him about the NRCS and the assistance available through

the agency to help agricultural producers with land management issues.

Martin, like many Valley producers, was dealing with an inefficient irrigation system, poor land uniformity, and soil erosion, resulting in a lot of time spent in the field trying to make the most of his water supply for his hay production. Martin started working with Raul "Ray" Hinojosa, district conservationist at the Edinburg NRCS office, to develop a voluntary conservation plan to help him address the ranch's natural resource concerns through an improved efficient irrigation system. Rolando Miranda, soil technician with NRCS, assisted with the surveying and designing of Pena's new irrigation system.

"Conserving and utilizing water efficiently is continually important within the Rio Grande Valley," said Hinojosa, "Using conservation practices such as land leveling and irrigation pipelines creates a delivery system that is specific to the location you need water - there's no waste transporting it from the source to where you need it to go."

Martin said, "Too many times, we see farmers using a trench system or watering ditch and they have water spill over the dirt banks. The water flow tends to erode the very water banks that were created to contain the flow. This leads to hundreds if not thousands of gallons being leaked onto adjacent grounds."

By working with NRCS to install the recommended irrigation system and pipelines, Martin, his wife and employees can now water the ranch's fields without the added worry of water leaking out of the irrigation canals. Thanks to the new efficient irrigation system, less trips are made to irrigation sites by Martin and his employees. Employees no longer have to sit in vehicles during the heat of the day monitoring the water canal, watering tarps, and inspecting for improper water flow.



Martin shared about what he calls the “short term loss opportunity” compared to the long term benefits of installing conservation. The short term loss opportunity of not cutting and selling or using the hay was minor compared to the long term benefits of installing the irrigation system and pipelines.

After installing the irrigation pipelines and land leveling the hay field and re-seeding, hay production went from 360 bales to 2,000 bales. Hay quality has improved due to improved water efficiency and soil that wasn’t washed away.

“Eliminating the watering canals also means eliminating a stagnant water source,” said Martin. “With the old system, when watering is completed in a pasture, water can remain in the irrigation ditch for weeks. This is a prime breeding ground for mosquitos and rodents. With diseases carried by mosquitos, the positive impact made by irrigation lines is immeasurable.”

Cristal sees the benefits of conservation from the family perspective. Now the family is able to spend more time together and even go out of town since they don’t have to worry about the water canals leaking.

“Also, Martin doesn’t come in drenched in irrigation water from being in the ditch,” said Cristal. “Martin isn’t as sick as much because he isn’t in the water in all types of weather and stressing about the fields.”

Martin and Cristal know the importance of being good land stewards who not only benefit their operation, but the environment and the future of Valley agriculture. Their plans are to pass the ranching operations onto their children, Celeste, Carolina, and Martin Pena III, along with the conservation lessons and values they continue to learn.

## Caribbean Area

### Cover Crops & Conservation Covers Helping out Tropical Soils

By: Ismael Matos

In many places in the Caribbean, monoculture systems are often used during growing season. This system allows farmers to simplify crop management and concentrate efforts and resources on maximizing economic return from a single crop. But, this system can be a disadvantage to producers in terms of soil health and environmental balance.

Diversified cropping systems use a variety of plant species to more efficiently use soil and environmental resources. Farmers mix crops by planting several species together to help one another with their growing requirements, such as planting nitrogen-fixing legumes to benefit grasses.



*Cover Crop*

When cover crops are used as companion crops, they provide ground cover and weed control for slow-growing cash crops. Cover crops can also be used as living mulches by planting cash crops into a suppressed cover crop or intercropping a cash crop with a cover crop. These living mulches protect the soil from erosion and suppress weeds, and can also provide much-needed nutrients to the cash crop.

In the Caribbean area, cover crops can also be used during the rainy season as cover to protect the soil from runoff and during the dry season to maintain soil moisture and protect soils from wind erosion. Green manure is another use of cover crops in the Caribbean. Green manure is when the cover crop is incorporated into the soil by tillage to improve soil quality by adding organic matter.

Conservation covers are systems whose main purpose is to protect unused or fallow fields during resting periods or idle seasons. This practice is more permanent and is used to reduce erosion and sedimentation. Conservation covers are often used for wildlife and pollinator habitat improvement, and to enhance soil health on intensively-used land.

Soil Health is a priority concern for the Caribbean Area NRCS. NRCS is helping farmers and ranchers to enhance and improve soil health management through the implementation of conservation practices targeting soil degradation. Practices such as Cover Crops and Conservation Covers can yield healthy soils that help to combat natural and man-made environmental challenges, including climate change.

## Southeast Region

### Haitian Soils Cochran Fellowship Training with a Cooperative Effort

By Joxelle Velázquez-García, MLRA Soil Scientist, Meridian, MS



*Haiti Cochran Fellows and Training Cadre*

During the weeks of July 11-29, Soil Survey Region 7 (SSR-7) in a collaboration effort with Tuskegee University and Auburn University delivered an Initial Soil Survey Development Training to fourteen (14) professionals from Haiti. Among the Haitian experts, we had Agronomists, Agriculture Economist, Agronomical Engineers, Soil Analysis Laboratory Assistant, Agroforestry, and Pedology Assistants from the Ministry of Agriculture. We also had a Teacher of Veterinary Medicine from the Faculty of Agronomy and Veterinary Medicine (FAMV), Agricultural Production Researcher, and the Executive Director from Haitian Foundation

for Sustainable Agricultural Development (FONHDAD). The purpose of this training was to provide the necessary tools and knowledge in order to help them develop and manage a soil survey project in their homeland.

During the three weeks several training sessions were provided by Soil Scientists, GIS Specialist, and Ecological Data Quality Specialist from the SSR-7. Training sessions consisted on presentations on how to work with partners, ranking soil survey priorities, digital soil mapping, soil correlation, science of soil interpretations, soil taxonomy, ArcGIS, soil information delivery tools, and database development which would aid them in the management of soil survey operations.



*Soil Information Delivery Tools Presentation*

I had the great opportunity and privilege to be part of the training cadre with other two Hispanic soil scientists; Alvin Perez (MLRA Soil Survey Leader) from Tifton, Georgia and Martin Figueroa (Senior Soil Scientist) from Fort Myers, Florida. On my presentation I showed them briefly how to access, explore, and collect available soil information on different delivery platforms produced by the National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCSS) and USDA – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).



*Training sessions and field exercises*

It was an incredible three weeks for Haitian Cochran Fellowship participants, who showed an amazing willingness to learn and capture what was being taught. It was also great for the training staff as they too were able to expand their knowledge of Haitian agricultural practices and resource concerns through their interactions with the participants who presented questions and practical situations as it related to natural resources in Haiti. It was very gratifying being able to share knowledge

and experiences regarding the development of agriculture, as well as discuss the benefits from diversity and culture. It was certainly an unforgettable experience.

We thank the Foreign Agricultural Service - Cochran Fellowship Program for funding this activity, the NRCS Leadership for their support, and NRCS Soil Survey Region 7, Tuskegee University, and Auburn University for the hard work and dedication that made this training possible.

If you want to see more photos, please click the following web link below to access a digital photo album covering activities of the Haitian Cochran Fellowship Program: [Haiti Cochran Fellowship Program - USDA-NRCS, SSR-7, Auburn, \(July 11-29, 2016\)](#)

## Northeast Region

### New experience for Manuel Díaz

By: Manuel Díaz



Manuel Diaz Gonzalez is a new NRCS civil engineer working for the Milford field office in NH. On July 29<sup>th</sup> he welcomed his parents from Puerto Rico to New Hampshire for the first time and took the opportunity to show them the Benedikt Dairy Farm in Goffstown where he completed his first design for a farmstead engineering contract. Manuel got to show his parents the kind of projects he is working on by reviewing designs with them and the farm owners. Max and Melissa Blindow, also showed the

family around including the milking parlor and processing room (milk, cheese, butter, and yogurt). Manuel acted as a Spanish translator when Melissa was describing her operation. Catherine Magee, NRCS Soil Conservationist also works closely with the Benedikt Dairy Farm and joined the group on the tour. Manuel's parents were very interested in the differences between NH and PR soils. Benedikt Dairy has sandy loam soil and they mentioned that Puerto Rico it is mostly clay soil. Benedikt Dairy is an organic certified operation that also sells both brown and white eggs. It was great to have Manuel's parents come up to the farm, we hope to have them again soon!

### *Service Recognition Award!!!!*



Gorge González, Benavides Service Center, received a plaque honoring his 30 years of service to USDA-NRCS. Presented by Flavio Garza, RTL-Laredo.



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## Lifetime Membership Drive

### Lifetime Membership benefits:

- Your paid life membership dues are not subject to increase.
- Life memberships can decrease administrative expenditures.
- Life memberships increase revenues.
- A life membership provides peace-of-mind in that dues are current and saves money for the member.
- A life membership provides opportunity to promote the organization, increase stature, and for grassroots educational and outreach programs.
- A life membership provides a springboard for a separate entity within the organization to manage and administer these financial gains.
- A life membership offers a great degree of prestige and identifies you as an individual apart from the regular membership.
- A Life membership could generate income if it “raffle-off” occasionally as part of our regular membership drive or during “scholarship night”.

Currently the fee for a lifetime membership is \$500.00

### Payment Options:

- 1 payment of \$500.00
- 2 payments of \$250.00
- 4 payments of \$125.00
- 5 payments of \$100.00
- 10 payments of \$50.00

### Rules:

- The first payment has to be sent with the application form and choose what type of payment option.
- You have until March 1, 2017 to complete your payments.
- If for some reason you cannot finish by March 1 we will give you until April 30 to finish your commitment. A written statement requesting extension should be provided to the membership chair by March 1<sup>st</sup>.
- No money will be forfeit.
- If you change your mind or cannot finish the payment plan even with the extension, the money will be credited for future years. No money will be return.
- Payment options: by check address to NOPHNRCSE and PayPal. For PayPal payments please contact Bruni Velez [bvdpr@yahoo.com](mailto:bvdpr@yahoo.com).