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Dear NOPHNRCSE Members,

Spring is in the air. It is so good to hear the birds singing and flowers blooming. As we move forward in the next few months, we are looking into doing another training conference this fall. For that we will need your input. WE will be sending out a survey monkey to the membership to get your feedback on what you would like to

see as part of our conference. Please be watching for it.

I am pleased to announce our 2016-2017 council: Bianca Diaz, is the new Vice President. Staying on the council for a second term: Bruni Velez - Treasurer, Flavio Garza - South Central Region Rep; Luis Cruz-Arroyo- SE Region Rep; Mary Sánchez West Region Representative. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Edwin Martinez for his leadership as Vice President for the past 2 years. This year we will be recruiting a new President. Please start reaching out to members to ensure we have a good election year.



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On April 13, 2016, the Hispanic State Conservationists and Center Director met in person with Melissa Drummond, NRCS's new Chief Human Resources Officer. We discussed our

Hispanic Strategy Plan, recruitment/hiring events, how we can help the agency's success by providing support and by identifying universities or career events, identifying affinitive groups to enter

reduce gaps by affinitive groups. We will continue these meetings quarterly to update Melissa in our efforts and to see what else we can help the agency with.

Drummond. During the meeting she asked us to provide our ideas on how to improve our diversity numbers and what diversity training we can provide our managers. She asked for a fact sheet of each organization to give to all new employees as part of their on-boarding package. I am asking our communications committee

to update our fact sheet right away so we can share it with new employees. Please send me your ideas on how we can improve our numbers and what type of diversity training you would like to see provided.

We are also looking into have a training session with NEDC in October or November this year. Please stay tuned for more information.



#### **NOPHNRCSE Committee Chairs**

#### **NOPHNRCSE Planning Co-Chairs:**

Michael Margo and Noel Soto

Registration: Luis Cruz-Arroyo Agenda: Erika Justiniano-Velez

Moderators: Bianca Diaz-Deliz

Awards Luncheon: Luis Hernandez

Scholarship/Auction Night: Lindsay Martinez

Communications: Misha Vargas

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# **South Central Region**

## **USDA Hosted On Site Recruitment Event at Texas A&M Kingsville**

By Bertha T. Venegas

More than 100 students attended a USDA on site recruitment event March 2-3, 2016 at Texas A&M in Kingsville, with 71 students from across the U.S. applying for jobs. The recruitment event offered students an opportunity to apply for internships and recent graduate positions through Pathways Program. It was students from all over Texas and the nation Texas A&M-Kingsville.



open to the public and Rick Tafoya, NHEPM; Bertha Venegas, Texas State Outreach Specialist; Flavio Garza, students from all over Laredo Resource Team Leader and NOPHNRCSE South Central Regional Representative; and Sammy Guerrera, District Conservationist worked the onsite recruitment event at Texas A&M-Kinasville.

attended and applied for positions. Over 100 students visited the booth and were provided information about the positions that were being offered.

Texas A&M-Kingsville is one of South Texas' fastest growing universities, offering more academic programs and degrees, providing better learning and living facilities, doing more research, awarding more scholarships and producing more successful graduates than any other college or university in the region. Ethnically, the Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) reflects the demographics of the area, with 62 percent of the students Hispanic, 27 percent white, and five percent African American. About six percent are international students.

Texas A&M University boasts both a department of Animal, Rangeland and Wildlife Science and a department of Agriculture, Agribusiness and Environmental Science making it an ideal recruitment venue for agencies like NRCS.

In addition, the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management is the first program in the nation to provide a degree dealing with ranch management at the master's level. King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management (KRIRM) was created in 2003 to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of King Ranch, one of the birthplaces of the American ranching industry. In keeping with their long history of leadership and philanthropy, King Ranch and its family and friends created and endowed KRIRM in collaboration with Texas A&M University-Kingsville. The Master of Science in Ranch Management program is designed to train the next generations of leaders in the ranching industry, and

emphasizes the recruitment of mature and experienced students with a high potential for managing the complexities of diverse ranches.

## StrikeForce Awakens at Cowboy Breakfast in Maverick County

By Donnie Lunsford NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

Eagle Pass, Texas— Everyone knows that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. At the 2016 Jesus "Chuy" Sanchez Memorial Cowboy Breakfast, over 1,000 people were served a traditional cowboy breakfast that would have made John Wayne proud. The cowboy breakfast kicks off the Maverick County Junior Livestock Show held at the Zan Mathies Show Barn by Maverick County Lake.



The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) was able to present information on the StrikeForce for Rural Growth and

Bertha Venegas provides information of NRCS technical and financial assistance programs after introducing Serafin Aguirre, local District Conservationist for Eagle Pass and Mark Ramírez, Resource Team Leader for Uvalde.

Opportunity Initiative which helps to address challenges associated with rural poverty. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) provided information on conservation and financial assistance opportunities for individuals, groups, and communities.

"The cowboy breakfast is a great place for the USDA to reach out to the public and educate them on the great opportunities for conservation planning and financial assistance," said Serafin Aguirre, district conservationist in Eagle Pass. "We have been at the breakfast and stock show with the Maverick County Soil and Water Conservation District for the last four years and every year we are able to talk to people that didn't know that we were here to assist them."

Bertha Venegas, state Strike Force coordinator with the NRCS and a native of Eagle Pass, provided information on conservation planning and financial assistance through 2014 Farm Bill programs that can benefit farm or ranch operations.

"The NRCS has a mission of helping people help the land and we accomplish this by providing technical and financial assistance," Venegas said. "People need a farmer three times a day and we help those farmers create sustainability through good land stewardship."

Venegas said local NRCS conservationists can help develop a conservation plan for a farm or ranch operation. Local staff can also share how producers can utilize the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), NRCS's most popular program, to help implement conservation plan practices. The EQIP program allows NRCS to share the costs of implementing these conservation practices which benefit both the environment and producers.

Judith Canales, executive director of the Texas FSA and Eagle Pass native, spoke of opportunities and programs that her agency provides to the public including loan programs.

"The USDA through the FSA has over 400 participating farmers and ranchers in Maverick County alone in our many programs," said Canales. "We have loan programs that youth can use to purchase show animals. This will support local livestock shows like this one."

Both NRCS and FSA had booths at this event providing information to producers with local representatives. Students learned of careers offered by the USDA. Landowners and land managers were able to ask questions specific to their farm or ranch while visiting with staff at the booths.

## Salinas Receives Government Employee Leadership Award



Salvador Salinas, Texas State Conservationist for the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), was presented the Government Employee Leadership Award (G.E.L.A.) by MAFO during their 2016 National Conference in April in Austin, Texas.

MAFO is a national partnership of rural and farmworker organizations. Organized as a nonprofit organization, it devotes its resources to providing a national conference for farmworkers, farmworker organizations and federal and state agencies as a forum in which to address issues and policies impacting farmworkers.

The G.E.L.A. award recognizes those individuals who work with the federal, state or local government. Often times, individuals employed by federal, state or government face similar struggles as organizations and farmworkers in the fields, such as neglect, being overlooked or an under appreciation for their concern, work and contribution. This award recognized the struggles of individuals with the federal, state or local government as they work within a bureaucracy to augment programs for farmworkers and whose hard work and dedication demonstrate a commitment to improve the quality of life of farmworkers and their families.

Salinas leads a team of 735 NRCS employees who work with landowners to offer technical and financial assistance focused on treating natural resources problems on more than 171 million acres

of Texas lands. In his 38 years of federal service, Salinas has worked tirelessly with private landowners and land managers, local, state and federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, Tribes, and other community organizations and groups to ensure local resource problems are resolved and that USDA and NRCS goals are successfully accomplished.

Salinas makes it a priority to form collaborative partnerships with organizations that provide outreach and technical support to socially disadvantaged landowners, minority landowners, and those with limited resources. Additionally, he provides NRCS staff support, as well as other resources, to facilitate delivery of conservation and Farm Bill Program services while ensuring diversity of NRCS programs participation. For many years, Salinas has supported MAFO conferences with staff and other resources.

For more information on MAFO, visit http://www.mafofarmworker.com.

## **Employee Spotlight Women's History Month 2016**

Featuring Eileen Vale, Resource Team Leader, Vernon, Texas

By Sheena Schemm, Texas FWP Advisory Committee Zone 5 Representative, Soil Conservationist, Cleburne, TX

The family farm: It's more than a business. It is a lifestyle. It is an ideal worth preserving.

Eileen Vale has lived the farming lifestyle and believed in it enough that she began a career in agriculture to help others. She grew up in deep South Texas in a town called Edinburg. There, she helped on the family cattle ranch and citrus orchards. She started on the pathway to her career by obtaining her bachelor's degree in Rangeland Ecology and Management at Texas A&M University and then began working with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 2002.

In 2002, Eileen began her career as a GS7 in Brownwood. She got her GS9 and moved to Iowa Park in 2004 and stayed there as a planner for three years. In 2007, Eileen's agriculture background and experiences helped her land the role of District Conservationist in Iowa Park. After a little over seven years in that role working with landowners and



Eileen Vale, Resource Team Leader, Vernon TX

the local conservation district helping them set resource priorities for their county, she became a Resource Team Leader in Vernon. Eileen's career experiences on different projects and

committees landed her a special assignment in Oregon. She was the Acting Area Conservationist for Field Operations for the Southwest Basin in Roseburg, Oregon. She served in this position from November 2012 to February 2013.

Aside from Eileen's duties as a planner, or District Conservationist, she was also part of some special projects and roles. To name a few, she served as the Federal Women Program Manager (FWP) from 2009-2010, FWP Committee member from 2004-2009, Texas Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager from 2014 to present, Tool Kit Cadre, National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees, Emerging Leader Development Program, Texas Civil Rights Advisory Committee, 90% Solution, Field Office of the Future, Protracts team, and the State Budget Tool Analysis.

All these experiences led Eileen to work on a special project called Conservation Outcomes. The tool basically looks at outcomes of the conservation practices NRCS does for landowners, partners, and the public. For example, the outcome tool can be used to help the average tax payer see the importance of NRCS cost-sharing of terraces on a farm. It helps visualize what the impact of terraces could have on the public. This tool could possibly be used to communicate conservation effects on the ground to local Work Group Meetings and set priorities. The Outcome Narrative Logic Model was presented to NHQ leadership in October. Eileen and her partners are hoping that this tool, or a similar tool, will inform leaders and customers of our agency's achievements and progress toward conservation goals. It can also be used to describe conservation benefits to legislators. It will eventually help increase accountability for the use of program funds

Eileen's career has taken her many places around the state of Texas and out of state as well. Every place was different and with that she gained a lot of different vital experiences that she was able to take with her to the next location and the next step in her career. Her life experiences growing up, her education and employment has given Eileen the proficient ability to give sound advice to our agriculture producers, as well as preserve their way of life.

When asked what advice she would give a new employee coming on board with the agency she simply said: "Take advantage of every opportunity given to you."

## **Conservation Volunteers Honored During National Volunteer Week**



Temple, TX April 11, 2016 -- USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is celebrating National Volunteer Week April 10-16, 2016 by thanking and honoring its Earth Team volunteers throughout Texas for their service to conservation.

Earth Team is the agency's volunteer workforce, and nationally, in fiscal year 2015, more than 23,800 people donated 294,306 hours of service to NRCS valued at over \$6.8 million. In fiscal year 2015 in Texas, 1,216 volunteers donated 12,461 hours of service to NRCS worth \$287,475 in taxpayer savings.

"Volunteers work closely with our staff, and they play an important role in our state's conservation work," said Salvador Salinas, NRCS state conservationist. "They donate their time and talents in a wide array of areas from conservation education, conservation planning, clerical, communications and photography, that not only benefits NRCS, but our customers, partners and the environment."

Earth Team is a program that partners volunteers with NRCS employees. It was created in 1985 and offers many opportunities to individuals 14 and older who are interested in volunteering to improve the nation's natural resources. Earth Team volunteers help NRCS conservationists provide private landowners and others a range of services from conservation technical assistance to teaching and generating awareness about conservation through community projects.

Earth Team Volunteers allow NRCS to stretch available resources and help put additional conservation practices on the ground. Volunteer efforts help improve land and wildlife habitat and contribute to cleaner water and air for everyone.

Learn more about the Earth Team Volunteer Program, visit www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov or call (361) 241-0609 ext. 115. For more information on NRCS visit www.nrcs.usda.gov.

\*Note: The Value of Volunteer Time to the Agency is \$23.07/hour as established by the Independent Sector and utilized by the Federal Interagency Team for Volunteerism.

# Caribbean Area

# Success story related to PYMES ("Pequeños y Medianos Comerciantes) Ponce PR

By: Ismael Matos, Caribbean Regional Representative NOPHNRCSE/HEPM

"Fuerza PYME" Convention in Ponce PR to improve commercial Ag relation and USDA input

There was a convention March 3 at Ponce, Puerto Rico with merchants that want to improve their commerce in the island. These organization of small and intermediate commerce (PYME) is a NGO to improve our local links between farmers and other suppliers. They convoked all USDA and local Ag agencies to deal with approach programs and services that USDA and others



Memorandum of Understanding signed with PYMES

have to offer to beginning and small farmers improving similar enterprises that want to invest in their farms and related commerce. USDA FNS, FSA, RD and AMS, National Civil Rights of USDA, the USDA undersecretary and people from National Strike Force Team, were among the invited guest speakers. There was the Puerto Rico Secretary of Agriculture with a speech on Food Security, the President of the PR Agriculture Commission from Senate, talked about new incentive programs and speeding process permit for farmers. FNS presented the new opportunities for farmer to invest in the programs to sell their products as a USDA vendor. AMS talked about how to develop a plan to be certified as organic producer and extra funds to assist PYMES (acronym for local and intermediaries' commerce in Puerto Rico). Local NRCS were also there with a booth where they had a speaker talking about climate change resilience and water conservation such as water catchment facilities and similar practices that NRCS could assist in planning and implementation. Fernando Arroyo (ASTC for field operations), talked about water conservation and Jose Castro (ASTC for programs) talks about EQIP and others programs that farmers could use such as the Energy Initiative. We were in a booth presenting literature to outreach farmers and students where we emphasized the Organic Initiative, the High Tunnel and The Peoples Garden Initiative. At the booth I discussed and explained to potential clients the application process and how the mentioned activities work. We shared contact information and I sent them more information after the meeting. We interviewed several NRCS/ NOPSY potential candidates' youngsters' college and high schools students that came from local schools and universities to see our potential career offer. We distributed hundreds of brochures on "challenging Careers", and share our HEPM package for job opportunities, where to apply for student's grants, a page with shortcuts to "NOPSY", usajobs navigation, etc. A Spanish version of Web Soil Survey step by step was provided. We also provided instructions on how to apply for Innovation Grants. At the event we met 2 successful veteran farmers and coordinated a farm visit so this way we can bring other minorities that want to become part of the farming enterprise. We have 3 veteran farmers that are very successful with the High Tunnel initiative. We found that some minorities and handicaps can make good use of facilities such as a greenhouses to establish a farming enterprise in hilly areas in PR. This practice is an option for climate change resilience. We are looking for 0.5 acre of flat land in the hilly areas where a High Tunnel could be established. At this event we presented the benefits of the high Tunnel Structures and this year's availability. With the High Tunnel we can justify a photovoltaic pump for the irrigation in areas where there is no access to electricity. In Villalba Puerto Rico we made contact with two veteran farmers that are very successful and scheduled a visit. We will meet them in April with a group of minorities. The first visit was made in March 15 at Villalba.

# **Midwest Region**

## **Detail Experience for Minority**

By: Brendaly Rodriguez Muñoz



Brendaly Rodriguez meeting with a producer.

My calendar year started with a 60-day detail experience. I was the Acting District Conservationist for the Bangor Field Office in Penobscot County, Maine. I supervised three Soil Conservationists and managed a one-county service center. As a team we completed 70 ranking applications, 24 pre-approved applications into approved status which 10 of them got obligated in the meantime. Learning the differences between EQIP and AMA helped me to have a better understanding on how different things can work from one state to another. I had the

opportunity to work with Forestland, Cropland and Waste Storage Facility practices.

This was an eye-opening experience for me. Throughout my career I have been told that every state is different, but I never expected such a big difference. We all look for the same result -- to help the producers help the land – so it was very satisfying to see how different ways of doing things lead to the same result. On the management perspective, I learned the importance of meeting deadlines and keeping a clear communication between staff and leadership.

I am very grateful for this opportunity, and I am thankful to JR Flores STC Missouri and Juan Hernandez STC Maine for their support and commitment to their employees.

Lastly, in case you were wondering . . . yes, I ate lobster rolls! And, no, it wasn't a cold state, but Mainers say that it was an unusually warm winter.

# **Northeast Region**

## Spring Career Fair 2016 at Paul Smiths College

By: Janella Cruz

The first career fair of 2016 at Paul Smiths College took place on March 31<sup>st</sup> marking the welcoming of spring and new beginnings. As the warmer temperatures awaken the Adirondack landscape and wildlife they also energize the Paul Smiths students in their search for summer internships and post-graduation employment.

The day started with a gymnasium full of future employers from different regions of the Northeast including several government agencies. It wasn't long before students and alumni were circulating the gymnasium, some with hesitation while others



Soil Scientist Rebecca Fox representing NRCS while providing information of our Pathway Program.

made a beeline to their potential employer of choice. Students majoring in Forestry, Hospitality, Culinary Arts, and Environmental Management programs had their resumes in hand and some were even in suits. The students eagerly gathered information and connected with employers determining the best fit for themselves and employers. Networking also occurred among professors and career professionals addressing student needs stepping into the workforce.

At the end of the day NRCS had a great showing with over 80 students that stopped to pick up promotional material and chat with us. Over 25 of those students signed up to our emailing list with the purpose of getting updates for online and in-person USAJOBS application opportunities. Many of the students were really excited about the work NRCS does and found that it was directly in-line with their career goals. With another positive career fair under our belt and with help from Rebecca Fox, MLRA Soil Scientist Paul Smiths SSO, we will continue to motivate and support students with the proper tools. We have the hope that our work will result in students joining the agency and one day taking our place at the career fair encouraging other students to help people help the land.

# **Northern Plains Region**

Attend the 2016 National GreenLatinos Summit - May 24-27



By: Michael Martinez, Special Assistant to the Chief, NRCS HQ

You are invited to attend the 2016 National GreenLatinos Summit taking place May 24-27, 2016 at the Jackson Lake Lodge in the majestic Grand Teton National Park.

Bringing together the top Latino environmental and conservation advocates from around the country, along with top national leaders from the government, non-profit, funders, business and many more sectors together - This year's GreenLatinos Summit will offer attendees the most indepth and comprehensive compliment of substantive policy workshops, development and

coalition-building seminars, and top keynote speakers that will serve to strengthen our movement and shape our coalition's policy priorities for the coming year.

This year's Summit takes place at one of the most visited parks in the U.S. National Parks system. Overseen by Park Superintendent David Vela, The 2nd Annual GreenLatinos Summit will also offer attendees an opportunity to enjoy one of the most serene and wild national parks with a plethora of outdoor activities. I encourage attendees to schedule a few days before or after our official summit schedule to enjoy the park, and attendees are welcome to bring their families along.

The GreenLatinos Summit promises to be one of the most exciting and engaging events of the year. Your attendance and participation in the GreenLatinos Summit will add to the vital synergy of Latino environmental and conservation advocates at local, state, and national levels that will reverberate for years to come.

## Register for the conference at the link below:

http://www.greenlatinos.org/2016 greenlatinos summit

## Welcome, Welcome! To our new NOPHNRCSE Vice President



## Bianca Diaz-Delíz, Soil Conservationist, Columbus, NJ Field Office

Bianca was born and raised in Bayamon, Puerto Rico. She graduated from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Campus, with a B.S. in Animal Science.

Bianca began her career with NRCS as a Soil Conservationist Trainee at the Bangor Field Office, ME during the summer of 2012 between her sophomore and junior year, and returned to Maine during the summer of 2013 to work at the Augusta Field Office. When returning to Puerto Rico for her senior year of schooling, Bianca worked at the Mayaguez and San Sebastian Field Offices in Puerto Rico part-time throughout the year. Upon graduation in 2014, she came back to Maine as a soil conservationist in the Augusta Field Office. Currently Bianca works as a Soil Conservationist in New Jersey.

"My work has been gratifying," Bianca said. "I owe a debt of gratitude to some very knowledgeable and respected soil conservationists who shared what they knew with me and guided me on this path. I never planned to be a Soil Conservationist, in fact I thought I wanted to be a Veterinarian, but as is many times the case, it is a simple twist of fate that determines the future. Make the journey memorable and don't be fearful of trying something a little bit different than the rest...difference stands out in a crowd."

#### One of Our Lifetime Members Announces Retirement



Sharyn C. Alvarez, National Federal Women's Program Manager, will retire from NRCS with over 30 years in service on May 31, 2016. Sharyn is a NOPHNRCSE lifetime member and great supporter of the organization. As such we want to thanks her for her contributions to the organization and the agency. Sharyn began her federal career in North Carolina and will return there and live in the town of Oxford, NC. If you would like to contact Sharyn, write her at 109 Kipling Drive Oxford, NC27575 or Sharyn.alvarez@hotmail.com or call (703) 408-8615.



Region	Representative	Phone	Email
Caribbean area	Ismael Matos	787-766-5206, ext.128	<u>Ismael.Matos@pr.usda.gov</u>
East	Gisela Carmenaty	724-853-5555, ext. 118	Gisela.Carmenaty@pa.usda.gov
Midwest	Rocemi Morales	440-326-5806	Rocemi.Morales@oh.usda.gov
Northern plains	Roberto Luciano	701-463-2851, ext. 244	Roberto.Luciano@nd.usda.gov
South Central	Flavio Garza	956-723-6643, ext. 3	Flavio.Garza@tx.usda.gov
South East	Luis Cruz-Arroyo	251-275-3185	<u>Luis.Cruz-Arroyo@al.usda.gov</u>
West	Mary Sanchez	575-522-8775	Mary.Sanchez@nm.usda.gov



### 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 .