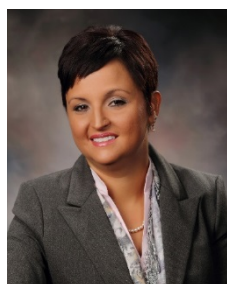




**Professional Hispanics coming together at the Northeast Soil Workshop...Page10**



Happy Summer NOPHNRCSE members!

I hope you are enjoying your summer months with your family and friends. First of all I want to thank all of you for answering our survey monkey this spring. This survey helped us to identify potential training for our next training conference or future training opportunities. I want to bring you up to speed on a few things the council is working on right now. We are

looking into hosting a training conference in conjunction with NEDC the week of October 31. Some of the training topics we are looking into provide are: Toolkit, CSP, EFT (engineering field tools), Conservation Client Gateway, building an effective resume, leadership training among others. Stay tuned for more information.

We will be starting to look for council nominations and membership awards in the next two months. Please keep in mind this year we will be looking for a new President as I have been your President for the last 4 years. Please consider running for President or any other position in the council.

At the same time, start looking for members that have gone above and beyond the call of duty and nominate them for one of our membership awards.

NRCS launched a new 12-month Strategic Leadership Development Program (SLDP) in October 2016 for aspiring leaders. The program will include classroom training (virtual or in-person), learning teams, coaching, mentoring, a targeted stretch assignment, and a group project focused on an agency priority, challenge, or opportunity. SLDP is designed to develop a cadre of effective leaders capable of moving into positions with increasing strategic responsibilities within the agency over the next five years. Individuals interested in becoming state, regional, or national leaders may find this program valuable. A national bulletin is forthcoming, and all job series are welcome to apply.



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*USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack (2nd from right) holds a press conference at the USDA-FS International Institute of Tropical Forestry on June 2, 2016 to announce Eastern Puerto Rico Promise Zone...Page 7*

SLDP eligible applicants must:

- \* Be a GS-13 or above for at least two years when application period closes,
- \* Have at least three years supervisory experience; individuals who manage national programs must have two or more years of direct reporting supervisory experience as part of their three years of supervisory experience,
- \* Have not participated in any prior NHQ leadership development program (National Leaders, Emerging Leaders, and SLDP)
- \* Complete a 60-day stretch assignment outside of official duties within the 12 months.

NHQ will fund tuition, travel, lodging, and per diem. Participants' home units will fund salary and benefits. Applications should be submitted by close of business [on Friday, August 5, 2016](#).

Completed application packages must contain:

- \* A completed and signed Strategic Leadership Development Program application
- \* A current resume
- \* Two letters of recommendation from NRCS state, regional, and/or national leaders
- \* A narrative describing experiences and accomplishments, highlighting SLDP key competencies written in the Challenge-Context-Action-Result (CCAR) Model. Responses are limited to one page for each competency.

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Completed application packages must be received by [5 p.m. EST on Friday, August 5, 2016](#). Applications should be sent to Jacqui Gaskill, SLDP Program Manager ([Jacqui.gaskill@ftw.usda.gov](mailto:Jacqui.gaskill@ftw.usda.gov) <<mailto:Jacqui.gaskill@ftw.usda.gov>>). The SLDP application and additional information on the SLDP and CCAR model can be found at the USDA Connect Site below. <https://connections.usda.gov/communities/service/html/communityview?communityUuid=18bf9945-457b-4abf-9e24-dafdf8850d08>

I encourage you to apply and to take advantage of this opportunity.

Last but not least, if you haven't joined us in Facebook look for our page National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees to receive up to date information about our training conference, vacancy announcements and more.

## National Council

### President

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## South Central Region

### Civil Rights to Silver Rights Texas Tour

By Melissa Blair, NRCS Zone 3 Public Affairs Specialist

Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Dr. Joe Leonard Jr., USDA Office of Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (OASCR), and some of his staff from Washington D.C. and other USDA officials, were in Texas in June to meet with state USDA leadership, partners and others to share and discuss available assistance through the USDA.

Dr. Leonard and his team, along with Salvador Salinas, TX state conservationist, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS); Paco Valentin, Texas state director of Rural Development (RD), and Tommy Miertschin, county



*(L to R) NRCS Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations, Tomas Dominguez; NRCS State Conservationist, Salvador Salinas; NRCS San Antonio Resource Team Leader, Samantha Salinas; Texas Rural Development Executive Director Paco Valentin; and NRCS State Outreach Coordinator, Bertha Venegas join Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Dr. Joe Leonard, and members of his staff from the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights.*

executive director with USDA-Farm Service Agency (FSA), met with representatives at the Emma S. Barrientos Mexican American Cultural Center in Austin to discuss ideas and ways to develop a farmer's market that draws in minority farmers and ranchers to sell their agricultural products.

USDA officials also hosted a workshop with Roger C. Rocha Jr., national president of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) at Laredo Community College. The gathering provided an opportunity for Dr. Leonard and his staff to share about OASCR efforts across the U.S, as well as NRCS, FSA, RD and the USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA), to share about the their programs and services.



Urban agriculture and healthy eating were the topics at IDEA Monterrey Park in San Antonio. The group was able to see and hear about the school garden they helped fund in 2015. OASCR provided a \$3,000 grant to IDEA Monterrey Park to purchase supplies for building the school garden as part of their educational outreach across the U.S. Dr. Leonard and his team heard from Cecile Parrish, central Texas farm coordinator for IDEA about their plans for developing an educational farm, located beside the school, that will also provide food for the school cafeteria. USDA officials shared ways their agencies could assist with the school's efforts.

Dr. Leonard and USDA officials then toured areas impacted by flood damage in Hays County and learned about the 2015 May and October historic rains and flooding, which caused extensive damage in Hays County and other areas of Texas. NRCS in Texas will receive \$21 million in conservation funding through the agency's Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP) to repair damages in 17 Texas counties affected by the severe flooding.

## **Workshop Helps Valley Farmers Gain Knowledge on Starting their own Farm or Ranch**

By Melissa Blair, NRCS Zone 3 Public Affairs Specialist

For the 25 attendees at the Hope House at the Yaweh's All Natural Farm and Ranch workshop in Harlingen in April, it was an exciting time of learning what resources are available to assist in achieving their goal of farming, ranching or even large scale gardening. Some came because they were already working with Yaweh owners Diana and Saul Padilla, and wanted to learn more about the programs the Padilla's use to accomplish their successes. Others came because they had agricultural land and wanted to know what resources were available to help them start farming or ranching.



*Diana Padilla talks about installing the seasonal high tunnel themselves and about the vegetables grown*

Diana Padilla opened the workshop by sharing how she and her husband, Saul, have worked with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to improve their agricultural production and water usage through land leveling, a drip irrigation system, a rain water harvester, seasonal high tunnel and grass planting.

The free event was hosted by the Texas Mexico Border Coalition and the NRCS through USDA's StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity Initiative, of which Texas is one of 21 states within the initiative. NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, Melissa Blair, shared with the group how through StrikeForce, NRCS is working with more farmers and ranchers than ever in communities that face persistent poverty. As a result, these producers are seeing their operations become more sustainable while their conservation practices help promote clean air and water, healthy soils and wildlife habitat.

NRCS Agronomist, Bruce Henderson, enlightened the audience about the importance of soil health in a productive and sustainable farm or ranch, as well as how birds, bees and pollinators also help improve vegetable and crop production. Cameron County District Conservationist, Oz Longoria, shared how NRCS can provide technical and financial assistance for conservation planning to improve the natural resources, soil health, help develop pollinator habitat or for installing seasonal higher tunnels. Henderson and Longoria also shared how NRCS can help with organic and transitioning to organic production. The workshop wrapped up with a tour of the Padilla's seasonal high tunnel which featured tomatoes, peppers and an assortment of vegetables that attendees were able to enjoy as appetizers during the workshop.

One attendee, Jesse Sanchez Jr. from Mission, came to learn what he could do to put his grandfather's dormant agricultural land back into production. He was excited to make contacts and learn about the resources available to help him prevent costly mistakes and lost time.

"In fact, the next day I already had the ball rolling by making visits to the USDA-NRCS and Farm Service Agency (FSA) offices in Edinburg, where I ran into a rancher friend who was working with both agencies," said Sanchez. "I was able to gather more helpful information for my endeavor and learn about more benefits of working with USDA agencies to help me accomplish my goals."



*The 25 Valley Farmers at the Yaweh's All Natural Farm and Ranch workshop in Harlingen.*

## Keeping up with the Wrights

By Donnie Lunsford, Public Affairs Specialist NRCS

As the Texas hill country starts from the west on Interstate 10 near Junction, Texas, a 17 year old young man walks up on a rancher as he is working cattle to ask if he has some work for wages and a place to stay. The rancher wasn't sure what to think of this young man. The rancher had him camp out under an Ashe Juniper (cedar). Forty-nine years have come and gone since that day, now that young man and his wife own the ranch. Jim Henry and Ann Wright gave the ranch to the Murillo family upon their passing in 2000 and 2004.



*Murillo and his wife*

Jose followed in Mr. and Mrs. Wrights footsteps ranching the rocky hills. Over the years, he began to see the decline of little bluestem, sideoats grama, and halls panicum. He was forced to burn prickly pear through drought years. He knew he needed some guidance.

In 2010, Murillo walked into the Junction NRCS field office to look for assistance. The ranch was overgrazed with only a water well at the ranching headquarters. Jose took the advice from the conservation planner and removed all livestock on his 850 acre ranch. Immediately, they began to work on a conservation plan to outline the resource concerns and conservation practices to achieve the desired outcome of the ranches capabilities. Using Farm Bill Programs, he was able to improve his water distribution and grazing management by the use of cross fences to move cattle more frequently and allow each pasture to rest.

Over three growing seasons, he saw the ranch begin to heal. Jose kept clearing invasive Ashe Juniper, as he always had, which would improve forage production and wildlife habitat.

In 2014, Jose worked with the NRCS to find the appropriate stocking rate of cattle and goats while managing for wildlife. He has had the same hunters for more than a decade working together to select proper harvesting rates. Three watering systems have been installed with solar pumps on each well, thousands of feet of fencing, and hundreds of acres of brush cleared. Jose is a member of the Texas Farm Bureau and Texas and Southwest Cattle Raisers Association.

Today the ranch is healthy with vast diversity. Many lessons have been learned and conservation practices implemented over the years. The Wrights would be so proud of what the Murillos have transformed the ranch to what it is today.

"Don't be afraid to start at the bottom and work hard. I worked for 3 dollars a day from sun up to sun down. My wife and I had to work off of the ranch to make ends meet at times," said Murillo. "Continue to learn and don't make the land produce more than it is capable of."

## Caribbean Area

### Secretary Vilsack Announces New Promise Zone Designation for Puerto Rico

On June 2, 2016, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack announced several measures to strengthen rural opportunity in Puerto Rico, selection of the Roosevelt Roads area in Eastern Puerto Rico as a federal Promise Zone. Vilsack made the announcement at the conclusion of a three-day trip to Puerto Rico, his first official visit to the island territory. Vilsack met with elected officials and agricultural and economic leaders to discuss USDA's efforts to support rural communities and combat climate change.

The new measures are in addition to the more than **\$20 billion** USDA has already invested in Puerto Rico since 2009.



USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack (2nd from right) holds a press conference at the USDA-FS International Institute of Tropical Forestry on June 2, 2016 to announce Eastern Puerto Rico Promise Zone. Joining him are (left to right) PR Secretary of Agriculture, Dr. Myrna Comas; UPR President, Dr. Urayoan Walker; and PR Industrial Development Company Director, Eng. Antonio Medina.

*"Rural areas like Eastern Puerto Rico face unique challenges, and we are committed to matching those challenges with creative solutions to help strengthen communities," said Vilsack. "The Promise Zones initiative has produced proven results by encouraging collaboration between the federal government, community organizations, the private sector and state and local governments. Through these partnerships, we are supporting jobs and economic opportunities that enable rural areas to thrive."*

The Eastern Puerto Rico Promise Zone (EPRPZ) will accelerate redevelopment to benefit the wider Eastern Region of Puerto Rico through job creation and increasing economic activity and access to health care. The primary goals are to:

- Create jobs by boosting tourism and development, attracting film and TV production to Puerto Rico, establish an environmentally and technologically advanced ship recycling facility as well as constructing marinas, and establishing a logistics and distribution hub for surrounding islands;
- Improve educational opportunities;
- Reduce violent crimes by refurbishing the prison facilities and improving prisoner re-entry programs;
- Promote health by developing a food hub and a commercial-scale hydroponic farm with teaching kitchens and a food business incubator; and
- Construct safe and affordable housing.



Vilsack also announced that USDA will enact two nutrition-related measures in Puerto Rico. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service approved a 17-percent increase in school meal reimbursement rates for Puerto Rico to reflect their higher costs of providing school meals. The rate adjustment will take effect July 1, 2016 and will result in approximately \$25 million annually in additional federal outlays. USDA is also making the Family Market pilot program permanent. The program allows Special Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants to use their EBT cards to buy food at participating farmers markets to help ensure community access to fresh, healthy food; support local farmers and ranchers selling at the farmers markets; and keep more food dollars in the local economy. To date almost **\$40 million** in SNAP benefits have been directed back to the local agricultural economy.

Vilsack met with Puerto Rican farmers, ranchers, livestock producers, specialty crop producers, Dr. Myrna Comas, Puerto Rico Secretary of Agriculture, and Pablo Jimenez, Puerto Rico College of Agronomists President. Puerto Rico has over 637,000 acres of agriculture land and more than 13,000 farmers. During the last few years, agriculture has become one of the most effective economic development industries in the Commonwealth. Great challenges exist in the sector, including high energy costs, vulnerability to climate change, and market development.



In April 2015, USDA included Puerto Rico in the **StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity Initiative**. Through StrikeForce, USDA is leveraging resources and collaborating with partners and stakeholders to improve economic opportunity and quality of life in impoverished rural areas. These efforts have invested more than **\$331 million in Puerto Rico** (PDF, 514 KB) in 2015 alone to create jobs, build homes, feed kids, help farmers and conserve natural resources.

## West Region

### Hey You from the Wild Wild West!

By Mary Sanchez, you're West Regional Representative

Summer time is finally here!

NOPHNRCSE is a great organization that cares for you the Hispanic employees of NRCS. We are a united minority group that is assuring equal treatment, while strengthening NRCS's efforts in the recruitment, retention, development, and advancement of Hispanics.

The West Regional who led NOPSY in membership has fallen way behind the other regions and it is time to step up to the plate. I encourage YOU life members to recruit a new member to this excellent organization. I challenge the GS 12 and above to be members and get involve. I Challenge the

Hispanic STATE CONSERVATIONISTS of the WEST to really encourage the employee to join NOPHNRCSE through the website ([www.nophnrcse.org](http://www.nophnrcse.org)) or a least encourage your SEPM to join their own organization group.

The West region and NOPHNRCSE has a wealth of information to share, experience of a lifetime to come and great members to mentor from - who understand cultural differences and can help you set your goals, help with problems, and assure that you don't feel alone within the agency.

Thanks for your time, and I look forward to visiting with you!

## Northeast Region

### Hispanic Professionals coming together at the 2016 Northeast Soils Workshop

The 2016 Northeast Cooperative Soil Survey Workshop took place on Monday June 20<sup>th</sup> till the 23<sup>rd</sup> of 2016 in the picturesque village of Lake Placid, NY. Every two years the Soil Workshops bring people from the National Cooperative Soil Survey (NCSS); represented by the Soil Science Division, MLRA Field Staff and University Cooperators for update reports and information sharing of current and future projects. This time it was New York's turn to host which was led by NRCS NY and Cornell University at



*Olga Vargas-Resource Soil Scientist, Edwin Muniz- AS Soil Scientist, Janella Cruz-Soil Scientist*



*Field trip at Heaven Hill Lake Placid, NY describing a Spodosol*

the beautiful grounds of Lake Placid home of two Winter Olympics, the 2000 Goodwill games and now the 2016 Northeast Cooperative Workshop.

The Workshop began with New York State Conservationist Greg Kist giving a warm welcome speech to the audience before starting scheduled sessions. Afterwards NCSS addressed regional updates followed by university cooperators, committee break-out sessions the following day as well as poster presentations, and a field trip to Whiteface Mountain Veterans Memorial Highway led by the Paul Smiths MLRA Soil Survey Office.

The workshop presented a great opportunity to meet with Soil Scientists, Ecologists, researchers, university Professors and grad students. Among the participants were Olga Vargas the Resource Soil Scientist in Greenwich, NY who during the poster sessions co-presented "X-Ray Fluorescence (XRF): A tool for Rapid Trace Metal Analysis" and Edwin Muñiz the Assistant State Soil Scientist for New Jersey who spoke about New Technology during committee reports. Overall the Workshop presented a viable opportunity for a week-long event full of spirited discussions in soil taxonomy and development in hydric/subaqueous projects. The mayor theme throughout the workshop was ways to improve collaboration.



*View of the Adirondacks from one of the field sites at Whiteface Mountain in Wilmington, NY.*

## **Limited English Proficiency (LEP) experience with a Korean producer at Salisbury, Maryland**

Communication is one of the most important aspects of human interaction. Ineffective communication can lead to detrimental mishaps that can have dire consequences on all parties involved. Limited English Proficiency (LEP) programs ensure that these incidents do not occur due to the excellent help of the LEP providers. I had the privilege of interacting with a customer of whose native language was Korean. Through the LEP program my supervisor (Acting District Conservationist Bianca Soto) and I were able to explain the customer's contract with him. The translator was very pleasant and seemed to effectively translate the information presented to the customer. This program is a great tool to use to ensure that our customers have equal opportunity to receive the information that NRCS has to offer.

Ellis Collier  
Soil Conservationist Technician  
Summer Pathways Student

**UPDATES!!!!**

### **2016 NOPHNRCSES Scholarships Updates**

We received 17 applications for 2016 NOPHNRCSE Scholarships and one of Martha Arteaga from different states and location from Nevada, California, Texas, Virginia, New York, North Carolina, Illinois, Puerto Rico and Florida. Our Scholarship committee will select the 2016 Scholarship NOPHNRCSE winners on August 10, 2016.

Thanks for all members, employees and partners to share this announcement of 2016 NOPHNRCSE Scholarship with our community.

Our Scholarship committee is looking for NOPHNRCSE members to be part of our team. If you like to work with students, provide input and ideas, please contact Bianca Soto by email at [Bianca.soto@md.usda.gov](mailto:Bianca.soto@md.usda.gov) to be part of the NOPHNRCSE scholarship team.

Bianca Soto  
Scholarship Chair Committee

## National Hispanic Program Update—Creating and Expanding Partnerships

Over the past several months, Rick Tafoya, National HEPM has been working on processing existing NRCS agreements, as well as establishing new agreements with various partners. The purpose of the agreements range in purpose and scope, but in general, most have an outreach, recruitment, training, developmental, and diversity component. These agreements are vital towards building new partnerships with organizations that have similar interests as NRCS and consistent with our agency mission. Equally, existing partnerships help in maintaining or enhancing projects that have traditionally yielded positive results. The following highlights the agreements with a brief description of the general purpose and focus:

**NMSU, TAMUK, CSUF, and UPR:** Created to establish and strengthen the USDA-NRCS diversity recruitment mission by partnering with New Mexico State University, Texas A&M University, Kingsville, California State University, Fresno, and the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez. The partnership expands the scope of the Natural Resources Career Development Program (NRCDP). When the NRCDP was created in 2015, it was designed to provide guidance to college students on NRCS career options, workshops focused on resume building, how to navigate USAJOBS and how apply for Pathways positions. Starting in 2016/2017, the NRCDP will also provide eligible students, at these HSI, summer internships with NRCS. The University sponsored internships will provide the students with direct agency work experience, thus making the student extremely competitive the subsequent year for Pathways positions. Combined, the four partner HSI will create approximately 25 internship positions for NRCS in 2017.

The National HEPM, working with the agency leadership, made these partnership agreements possible by increasing the funding level for the National Hispanic Recruitment Initiative, which outlines key goals and objectives in improving the persistent underrepresentation of Hispanics in the agency workforce. The Hispanic Recruitment Initiative will continue to evolve, creating other strategic opportunities, and will be phased in over a five-ten year period.

**LATINOS IN AGRICULTURE:** NRCS has again partnered with Latinos in Agriculture by becoming a Diamond Level Sponsor for the 2016 Annual Conference. The conference targets and draws under-represented college students from all across the U.S. and provides a unique forum to share ideas of the best and most promising practices in outreach to Hispanics interested in careers in Agriculture and Natural Resource management. As part of our sponsorship support, NRCS will provide travel scholarships to eligible students, conduct informative workshops, and host an agency exhibit booth. The conference will be held at the Courtyard & TownePlace Suites by Marriott in Grapevine, TX, October 28-30. More information can be found at <http://www.latinosinagriculture.com/>

**HACU:** The NRCS partnership includes the USDA-Office of Advocacy and Outreach-National HSI Program, and the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU). This collaborative is designed to expose both undergraduate and graduate students to the federal sector to gain valuable professional experience that complements their education. HACU interns that work for NRCS gain practical natural resources management experience. NRCS hosted 12 HACU summer interns in multiple states including NJ, NH, WI, IA, IL, WY and CA. Two other interns were placed at NEDC and the Central National Technology Support Center (CNTSC) in Ft. Worth, TX.

**SACNAS:** NRCS has partnered again with the Department, and other USDA agencies, to sponsor the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) 2016 annual conference, which will be held October 13-15 in Long Beach, CA. SACNAS is a society of scientists dedicated to fostering the success of Hispanic/Chicano and Native American students seeking to attain advanced degrees, careers, and positions of leadership in science.



**FFA:** This agreement with the Future Farmers of America (FFA) continues NRCS' long-standing support of the FFA National Convention through the Environmental/Natural Resources Career Development Events (CDE); the National FFA Collegiate Expo Conference, and the National FFA Career Show programs. NRCS-Indiana will work the exhibit booth and represent the agency at the annual convention October 19-22 in Indianapolis, IN.

As reflected in the above agreements, the new and expanded collaborations are focused on measurable results, will create exciting opportunities, will address the goals of the Hispanic Recruitment Initiative, and will certainly help meet some of the agency's 2016 priorities.

*Submitted by Rick Tafoya, National Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager*

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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) .