



HELPING PEOPLE HELP THE LAND — Providing and Protecting...page 3



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President's Message

by Astrid Martinez



Hola NOPHNRCSE Members,

First, I want to thank you all for electing me as your NOPHNRCSE President and putting your trust and confidence in me. Our National Council has been working hard the past few months looking at ways to strengthen our organization and stimulate active participation of all members. We need your help to accomplish this. We will be asking for volunteers to serve on different ad hoc committees. If you are interested, please contact Roney Gutierrez with your preference.

We want to improve our website, newsletter and communications. You will see changes in the newsletter format and frequency. We want it to be more interactive and share our members' success

stories. Keep your eye on future issues of "La Voz". If you have good ideas, as I know you do, please send them to Kristie Wiley and/or your regional representative.

We had our national VTC back in October and it was a success. Not only NOPHNRCSE members benefitted from the Chief's message and Tanya Robles' presentation, but several states had their entire staff participate. I want to continue webinars like this. My goal is to have a quarterly VTC, but for this to happen, I am going to need your help. If you have specific topics you would like to address, please send them to your regional representative.

I am looking at ways to host a training conference. Given the fiscal climate, this will be a little challenging, but I know we can achieve this with the support of each one of our members. Stay tuned for more on this in the near future.

I encourage each one of you to keep track of our council meetings by reading our minutes. It is the best way to keep up with our progress. They are posted on our website as well as emailed to each of you. I, as well as each of the regional representatives, welcome your comments and suggestions.

Last but not least, I wish you all a new year full of health, happiness and blessings.

Astrid

Meet Your New National Council

Astrid Martinez, President

NRCS position: State Conservationist, Wyoming

Astrid began her career with the USDA NRCS in 1996 in the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). In her 15+ years with NRCS, she has worked as soil scientist in Greenfield, Mass., soil conservationist in Oconto, Wis., major land resource area soil survey office leader in Grand Island and Scottsbluff, Neb., and state soil scientist in Wyo. Born and raised in San German, Puerto Rico, Ms. Martinez graduated cum laude from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez campus, with a major in agronomy and soils. She earned a master's degree with honors in soils from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.



Volunteers dig plant beds at Panchamama Forest Garden...[page 4](#)



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NRCS State Conservationist, Salvador Salinas, spoke about the agency's career opportunities and cultural transformation at the Latinos in Agriculture Leaders Forum...[page 8](#)

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Meet Your National Council continued...



Irma Hernández, Executive Vice President
NRCS position: CSP National Program Specialist

Irma has a bachelor's degree in biology and a master's degree in environmental science from the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico. She was introduced to NOPHNRCSE during the 2000 annual conference in Washington D.C.—shortly after moving to the States to start her career with NRCS as a Soil Conservationist in New Jersey. Since then, Irma has held different positions, completed several details, and had collateral duties such as: statewide conservation planner, resource conservationist, HEPM, business tools specialist, program manager (CSP, GRP and WRP), EQIP national team member, and CSP national team leader. Currently, Irma serves as a program specialist focused mainly in policy, regulation, and contracting business tools for the Conservation Security and Stewardship programs in NHQ.



Roney Gutierrez, Vice President
NRCS position: Assistant State Conservationist for Easements, Florida

Roney was born in El Salvador and grew up in New York City. He has a B.A. from Cornell University and M.S. from North Carolina State University. Roney has worked with NRCS in North Carolina, California, Hawaii, and Florida. From 1999 to 2006, he left the agency to work in El Salvador for CARE International and the Swiss Agency for Development. Presently, Roney resides in Gainesville, Fla., with his wife and their two children.



Jorge Camacho, Treasurer
NRCS position: Budget Officer, Florida

"SALUDOS" to all of you! I am Jorge R. Camacho, member of NOPHNRCSE since 1995. I am the budget officer for NRCS Florida and currently serve as the NOPHNRCSE Treasurer with a vast experience of twenty eight years in the areas of finance, budget and accounting, and banking.



Tania Nanna, Secretary and Webmaster
NRCS position: Cartographer, Louisiana

Tania Nanna has been working for NRCS in Louisiana as a Cartographer since 2007. She moved from Fargo, N.D., to Central Louisiana after earning her M.S. in soil science and computer science from North Dakota State University. She loves her job at NRCS because it involves both GIS and soils. Central Louisiana is beautiful, warm, and charming with a lot of trees, which reminds her of southern Brazil where she grew up. She also enjoys being part of NOPHNRCSE and interacting with employees from so many different backgrounds.

Soils Information Available in Spanish

Soils Health Fact Sheets

NRCS has developed soil health fact sheets to help people understand the basics and benefits of soil health. Check out the Spanish version of these informative fact sheets at the [NRCS website](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

Click on the image below to download and print your 11x17 soil health poster in Spanish.



Map unit descriptions are also available in Spanish

To access the Spanish map unit descriptions in Web Soil Survey:

- 1 Open [Web Soil Survey](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)
- 2 Navigate to a general area of interest
- 3 Use the Area Of Interest (AOI) tools to select an AOI
- 4 Select the Soil Map tab to view the soils map (at this point, these hyperlinked Map Unit Names will still be in English)
- 5 Select the Soil Data Explorer tab
- 6 Select the AOI Inventory bar
- 7 Select the Descripción Unidad de Mapa bar
- 8 Select the View Soil Report button

Note: If the words containing Spanish accent marks look distorted in the report, hit the browser **Refresh** button to correct.

Future developments will include a Spanish version of the non-technical descriptions and a Spanish version of the How to Use Web Soil Survey document.

Helping People Help the Land

Protecting and Providing

by Jaime Tankersley, USDA-NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, San Angelo, TX

Ten. To some it is a perfect score, to others just another even number; but for Javier Mancha it was the acreage he obtained and worked by hand every day since he returned from the Vietnam War in 1969.

For the U.S. Army 1st Logistical Command veteran it was a cherished portion of God's green Earth and that sliver of Maverick County land on the Mexico border was all he needed to raise and provide for a family over the next four decades.

Humble Beginnings

Mancha's Rosita Valley farm is known for growing some of the hottest peppers and sweetest melons. It is in this fertile valley that Mancha raised and sold enough produce to put four daughters through college, and eventually obtain additional land that now allows him to raise cattle.

"I have always loved to farm," Mancha says. "I married my wife in 1967 and began my career as a farmer in 1970. Together we have raised cantaloupe, watermelon, peppers, squash, hay grazer and alfalfa."

Mancha has a sense of family pride that is depicted simply by listening to his story and letting his eyes tell you of his challenges in the agriculture arena.

"Mancha is a rare family name," he explains. "When my father was 10 years old he came to the U.S. (from Mexico) and he was soon responsible for helping his mother raise a family and provide for his siblings. In 1946, he opened a grocery store in Eagle Pass and worked as a butcher and baker."

That work ethic is still held in the heart of Mancha's grandchildren, as they can be seen in the summer months selling their grandfather's produce at roadside stands.

In 1983 those original 10 acres turned into 40 and Mancha grew to be respected and known for the same high quality and dependability as his crops.

"We struggled as farmers at times, but I learned not to fight nature but work with it and I tried

to learn something new every day that would make it easier for the next generation," Mancha notes.

Mancha does not apply herbicide to his produce, and when mechanical weed removal will not do the trick, you will see him with nothing more than a garden hoe and his own two hands taking care of his crops.

"It is an enormous sense of pride to not only farm, but to know that it is what has provided for my family," he says. "I could not have done it alone; I had good people support me and help me along the way."

Conservation Ethics

In 1975, Mancha entered into a Long Term Agreement (LTA) with what was known as the USDA-Soil Conservation Service, now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Through this agreement, a variety of conservation practices were applied to his Rosita Valley farm. He started and completed critical land treatment, land leveling, irrigation water management and irrigation canal lining.

"USDA-NRCS is part of the reason I can have such satisfaction as a farmer and rancher today," Mancha relates. "They helped me to learn about the business. I diversified my crops so that each year I would have something to sell."

Mancha didn't stop at his 40 acres of farmland. He bought 500 acres of irrigated pastureland in El Indio that had been abandoned, abused and overgrown with mesquite and other undesirable brush. Trusting his partners in conservation he turned yet again to NRCS for guidance and put together a conservation plan that would help to achieve his goals to heal the land.

"I have enough land to support my family; I do not want anymore," Mancha says. "I just want to work on what I have and make it better."

As a brush removal method, a root plow was put in the ground and a test plot was put into place to see how the land would react. Shortly after, success was seen, and this opened the door for a variety of practices that now lets the land support a cow/calf operation.



"I could easily retire, but I am not ready to give this up," says Javier Mancha with a smile and deep sense of satisfaction.

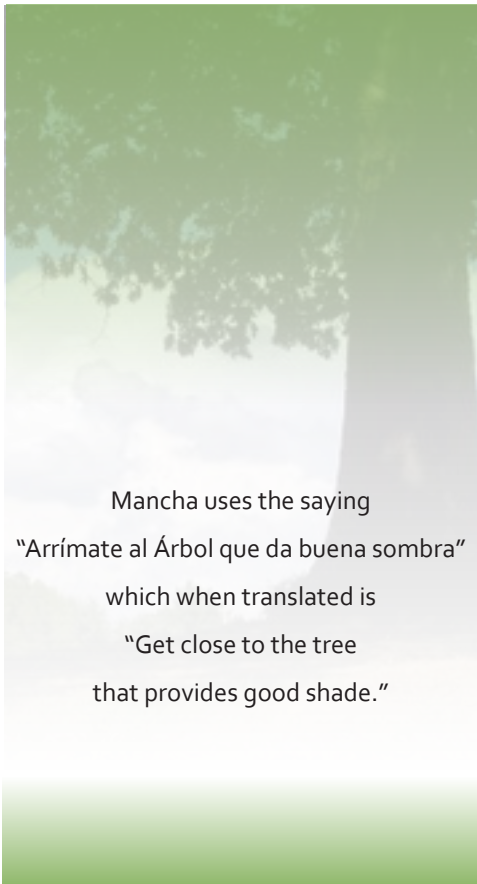
Mancha worked through the NRCS-Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to root plow and remove the undesirable trees and brush growing in his pastureland, build cross-fences and used irrigation NRCS technical assistance to improve the existing irrigation system. The ranch is located about a half mile from the Rio Grande River, and through the intricate irrigation system in place, Mancha receives the tail water off the over 90 miles of canal structure. This is used to water livestock and irrigate his thick stand of Tifton 85 and coastal Bermuda.

Mancha is currently in his fourth year as a Maverick County Soil and Water Conservation District chairman where he continues to pursue his own conservation education and share with others. "Mr. Mancha has done so much in the last four years for our district," says Serafin Aguirre, NRCS district conservationist in Eagle Pass.

Battling Fever Ticks

As the fever tick became a major concern, Aguirre and NRCS were present to help Mancha as he found himself in the middle of the quarantine zone.

Even though the tick was eradicated in 1943, with due time, the *Boophilus annulatus* and *Boophilus microplus* have made a comeback. Both are capable of carrying the protozoa that can transmit the disease Babesia or tick fever, which kills cattle.



Mancha uses the saying
 “Arrímate al Árbol que da buena sombra”
 which when translated is
 “Get close to the tree
 that provides good shade.”

Protecting and Providing continued...

Mancha, with aid from NRCS, built the cross-fences needed to set up a rotational grazing system that allows tick riders to work a smaller area. Once a month the cattle are penned and treated. Partnerships like this are what will close the book on the invasive species and allow livestock and wildlife to flourish in South Texas once again.

In it for the Long Haul

Even though cattle are the only livestock on his operation, Mancha also manages for the improvement of his turkey, deer and dove populations.

“Drought has had a major impact on our vegetation,” Mancha notes, “but nevertheless I was not forced to sell. I kept replacement heifers because of the good grass. It produces a lot of feed and has kept me in business in the worst drought in 50 years.

“Being a farmer and rancher has meant so many things to me,” he continues. “When I was young I just wanted to see my crops grow; now I know that I am part of the contribution that feeds America.

Seeds, soil and water were the foundation for Javier Mancha to begin his lifetime career of farming after returning from Vietnam, and those are the same three things he still strives to conserve today.

Early in his life, Mancha served his country to protect lives and provided a living for his family. Now Mancha continues those same ethics protecting the resources on his land so he can continue providing food for Americans.

Mancha uses the saying “*Arrímate al Árbol que da buena sombra*” which when translated is “*Get close to the tree that provides good shade.*” He said this sums up his lifetime full of enjoyable and grateful experiences in the farming community and his partnership with the NRCS.

Pachamama Forest Garden Works with the NRCS Organic Initiative to Create a Sustainable Farm

Over 10 inches of rain fell along Puerto Rico’s west coast last March, in a season that is usually dry. While a blessing, heavy rain can also cause complications for farmers. Resource Conservationist Raquel Robledo, with the Mayagüez NRCS field office, is helping Pachamama Forest Garden owner, Magha García, control runoff and conserve resources on her farm through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Pachamama Forest Garden is a 13-acre secondary forest farm in the Uroyaon Mountain Range between Mayagüez, Añasco and Las Marías. The Pachamama project uses a low impact approach to create a sustainable family farm. The concepts they are applying include agroecology, agroforestry, silviculture, permaculture, holistic and conservation farming.

Through the NRCS conservation planning process, Pachamama Forest Garden is installing practices to control storm water runoff flowing from the hills towards the valley where many food crops are planted. Ms. García saw immediate improvement in one field after she installed a hillside ditch. In less than a year, vegetation has grown up along the eroded ruts and bare, muddy areas damaged by motorcycles and ATVs, helping to protect the soil.

Ms. García and farm volunteers have started subsistence ecological planting of edible crops. They continue to move fallen trees, explore the land for nature trails, inventory flora and fauna, develop a biodiversity conservation plan and manage the farm’s natural resources. Thus, they will gradually integrate as many concepts of sustainability as possible. To follow Pachamama Forest Garden’s activities, visit their blog at: <http://pachamamapr.blogspot.com>.



Volunteer installs hillside ditch designed by NRCS in Pachamama Forest Garden.



Casey River in flood during March rains.

Why NOPHNCSE Can Still Be Relevant to Your Career

by Sharyn Alvarez, Lifetime Member

We are all asking if we can survive as an organization in this new economical environment we live in. Can we adjust, can we begin again? I say "Si se puede." Yes, it can be done. I remember when we first began as an organization, it was all about empowerment. In those days "empowerment" was a new word for me. I had heard it and read it and decided that I liked it. It inspired me to call the late, Ray Margo (our then "interim" president), and volunteer to be the "interim" secretary of NOPHNCSE (National Organization of Professional Hispanic Soil Conservation Service Employees). I was a GS-5 secretary of the engineering staff in the Raleigh, North Carolina state office. There was some discussion among the organizers of the organization, and soon my request was accepted. I became the first secretary of NOPHNCSE—a role that I was eventually elected to and served in for four years.

Being a participating member and officer of NOPHNCSE provided me with many opportunities to develop into the person I am today—into the employee I am today. When I think of things I am thankful for, NOPHNCSE is one of them.

We all seek opportunities to improve ourselves; to find ways to enhance our abilities and to move forward in our careers. One strategy you can employ is to be a participating member of NOPHNCSE. Remember the very old saying, you reap what you sow? It is that simple.

Working with an employee organization is all about opportunity:

- ▶ the opportunity to learn new skill sets;
- ▶ to showcase your skills;
- ▶ to hold leadership positions;
- ▶ to gain exposure and visibility;
- ▶ to help others; and
- ▶ to improve your network and access to information.

When you are a participating member of NOPHNCSE, you can develop new skills when you offer to recruit new members; write articles for La Voz; share your expertise and experience with members. You develop leadership skills when you are a committee chair or mentor an employee; enhance your time management and multitasking skills when you hold a full time job and still find time to volunteer. You showcase your skills when you use your computer skills to develop the newsletter; develop spreadsheets and conduct research for the organization. You gain exposure and visibility when you are part of a planning committee or your voice is heard during national council meetings. You improve your network and connections when you make friends with other colleagues in the organi-

We all seek opportunities to improve ourselves; to find ways to enhance our abilities and to move forward in our careers. One strategy you can employ is to be a participating member of NOPHNCSE.

zation—and through these relationships you increase your access to information.

Through these activities and interactions, your confidence and self-esteem will rise. You will improve your ability to negotiate, collaborate, and increase critical thinking skills. Through interaction with other members, you will have access to the historical knowledge they possess and this information will help you manage the cultural and political arena that exists in the workplace.

I learned a lot from my active participation in NOPHNCSE. In addition to being the secretary, I served as women's issues committee chair, communication chair, and worked on the scholarship committee. Members mentored me and extended their hand in friendships that I value to this day.

Not participating in NOPHNCSE will be a tremendously missed opportunity. I am personally asking you to spend some time in self-reflection. My hope is that you will rediscover that we share a common interest, purpose, and background. If you are willing to recommit to NOPHNCSE, together we can begin again—reach towards our untapped potential and become stronger and prouder than ever before.

Si se puede!

Hispanic Students Encouraged to Study Science

NOPHNCSE member Rafael Guerrero, Director of the Central National Technology Center in Fort Worth, and Jesus de los Santos, Engineer in Fort Stockton, participated in the Hispanic, Engineering, Science and Technology (HESTEC) Program in Edinburg, Texas held in September.

The HESTEC program was created 11 years ago to address the critical shortage of scientists and engineers in the U.S. It is a leadership

program created by University of Texas Pan American (UTPA) to promote science, technology, engineering and math careers among Hispanic students.

Student Leadership & Middle School Challenge Day was geared towards middle school students. NRCS participated in four breakout sessions as part of Middle School Challenge Day. Through the four sessions, about 640 middle school students from the Rio Grande

HESTEC has become a national model for promoting science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers among South Texas students who are predominantly Hispanic.

Valley and Corpus Christi participated. USDA scientists and technicians participated in student leadership breakout sessions reaching 80 students.

The event was a great way to simultaneously raise the profile of USDA and engage students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

To learn more, visit www.utpa.edu/hestec.

News from Around the Regions

In each issue of *La Voz* we would like to feature news from each region. Tell us about the exciting things happening in your area. Spotlight a new member. Share your volunteer experience. Tell us what is unique about your state. We want to hear from you! Work with your regional representative to ensure your region is featured in the next issue of *La Voz*.

Meet Your Regional Representatives...

CARIBBEAN AREA

Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands

Ismael Matos, Caribbean Area Representative

NRCS position: Resource Conservationist, Caribbean Area



Ismael Matos provides support to field personnel in ecological sciences and is the National Resource Inventory Specialist for NRCS Caribbean Area. Matos was born in Aguada, Puerto Rico and was involved in music, sports (track and field) and horticulture since childhood. Ismael graduated from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez campus in 1980, with a major in agronomy and in 1983 earned a master's degree in microbiology. One of his greatest accomplishments

has been assisting many successful underserved Hispanic farmers to get and stay in this business while conserving natural resources. Matos is a pioneer in the establishment of NOPHNRCSE. In his spare time, Matos enjoys farming and even established a conservation plan developed by NRCS for his property.

MIDWEST REGION

Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin

Frank R. Velazquez, Midwest Representative

NRCS position: Soil Conservationist, Michigan



Frank has worked as a soil conservationist in Michigan since 2009. He received a B.S. in agronomy from University of Puerto Rico and joined NRCS in 2002 in the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). Born in New York and raised in Camuy, Puerto Rico, Frank enjoys photography and travel.

EAST REGION

Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Virginia

Kristina Wiley (Kristie), East Representative

NRCS position: Editor, MO-12 Regional Office, Massachusetts



Born and raised in Texas, Kristie grew up raising and exhibiting livestock. An active member in the Future Farmers of America (FFA), Kristie credits her high school agricultural science teacher for giving her the desire to pursue a career in agriculture. She studied agricultural communications at Tarleton State University and later transferred to Eastern New Mexico University where she graduated *summa cum laude* and earned a bachelor's of science degree in communica-

tions. When not working, Kristie enjoys spending time with her family in Texas and helping her in-laws on their small vineyard in New Salem, Mass.

NORTHERN PLAINS REGION

Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming

Charlene Lucero, Northern Plains Representative

NRCS position: Administrative Assistant, Colorado State Office



Born and raised in Taos, N.M., Charlene moved to Colorado in 2005 and began her NRCS career in 2007. She enjoys coaching youth sports, reading, spending time with family, and playing softball.

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas

Ricardo J Luna, South Central Representative

NRCS position: District Conservationist, Texas



Ricardo was born and raised in Laredo, Texas. He has worked for NRCS for almost 11 years at various duty stations in Texas.

SOUTHEAST REGION

Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia

Carolyn King, Southeast Representative

NRCS position: Soil Conservation Technician, Baldwin County, Alabama



In my opinion the best position in this agency is the technician. Laugh if you will, but the technician is the one who is able to meet and work first hand with a variety of landowners and producers—being able to be a part of and changing the thumbprint left on the land. Although that is a reward in itself, working in Baldwin County, Alabama is equally so. We have the white sands of the Gulf of Mexico and the tall stands of Longleaf Pine in the north part of the county. It doesn't get any

better than that! I have been married to my husband, Bradley, for 32 years. We have 4 children.

WEST REGION

Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington

Carmen Ortiz, West Regional Representative

NRCS position: CA State Training Officer & AgLearn Administrator, Webmaster/SharePoint Administrator, State eAuthentication/SCIMS Coordinator



Carmen Ortiz is a NOPHNRCS charter member. She has been involved in many committees, including conference planning, communications, and women's issues, and served as webmaster for many years. Carmen has 30+ years with the federal government. Originally from Puerto Rico, she began her career at NHQ with the former Soil Conservation Service (SCS). She worked for SCS in Puerto Rico and for the Forest Service and the Farmers Home Administration in Wash-

ington, DC. Carmen has lived in California the last 22 years. She has two beautiful granddaughters and looks forward to retirement to spend more time with them, cycling with her husband on their tandem bike, and traveling around the world.

Activities are Underway

by Irma Hernández, Executive Vice President

This article is intended to inform NOPHNRCS members of some of the exciting activities the National Council is currently exploring and developing. Due to the current limitation of not having the traditional annual meeting, we have identified the need to evaluate the way we conduct business and operate as an organization. This paradigm shift gives us a great opportunity to revamp our communication, activities, and future plans. During this process, we will reevaluate the committees and restructure them, if needed. We need your help to accomplish our organization's goals in these challenging but interesting times.

One exciting area we are in the process of improving is our communication strategy. As part of this effort, the "La Voz" newsletter and NOPHNRCS website are being evaluated and significant changes are forthcoming. We need to find innovative and creative ways to provide interactive communication with our members across the country and territories.

Here are some of the activities that are being evaluated:

- ▶ **Facebook**—In the coming months, we will be joining millions of people that take advantage of the most popular media site of this era, Facebook. We are exploring establishing a semi-private NOPHNRCS Facebook page that will provide members the opportunity to interact with other members. We have a target date to get this going by early 2013.
- ▶ For those of you that are Facebook users, have Facebook skills, and are willing to work with the communications committee to help Lori Valadez set up the Facebook page, **please send your information, by email, to lori.valadez@mt.usda.gov, by February 20, 2013.**
- ▶ **eBay**—Another area that is also being explored is innovative ways to raise funds for the scholarship committee. An eBay non-profit organization account is a viable option for members to donate articles for auctions to replenish the scholarship fund, so we can continue with this important contribution to new generations of NRCS's.
- ▶ **Regional Activities**—Regions, we are also thinking about how you can become more active in your respective areas. We are developing a form and process for regions to request financial support from the National Council to accomplish activities that are consistent with the agency and organization mission goals. A list of potential activities that can be considered will be provided. The Council will evaluate any efforts that our members want to undertake and will prioritize the requests based on impact and fund availability.

The organization wants to support your personal, professional, and organizational goals. **Please send your name to Roney Gutierrez at roney.gutierrez@fl.usda.gov, by February 20, 2013**, if you are interested in serving on the ad hoc committee that will develop this process.

Webinars, training, awards, employee recognitions, and much more are also being discussed. More information is forthcoming, so stay tuned and watch for future communications! No matter if you are a new or an experienced member, we value your time, contributions and recommendations.

Texas NRCS Recruits at Latinos in Agriculture Leaders Forum

by Melissa Blair, USDA-NRCS Public Affairs Specialist, Corpus Christi, TX

More than 115 students, teachers, academia and agbusiness leaders attended the second annual Latinos in Agriculture Leaders Forum in Oct. in San Antonio. The theme "Growing a Better Future for Agriculture" was evident throughout the conference as presenters spoke about the opportunities for recruiting the growing Hispanic and Latino talent into agriculture. This year 40 college students from 14 states and several Latin American countries attended on scholarships made possible by event sponsors' contributions. They were able to network and learn about opportunities to further their education and careers in agriculture.

The Texas U.S. Department of Agriculture-Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS) was one of the sponsors of the three-day leadership forum and also provided assistance on the USDA 150th Celebration held the first night of the meeting.

The forum kicked off with a welcome from sponsors and co-founders of the event, Orlando Gil, president, TCTS Global, LLC and Dr. Edward W. Romero, founder and manager, AgForLife, LLC.

"Given the rapidly changing demographics and the low numbers of Hispanic students entering agriculture, it is time to explore ways to address this crisis, said Dr. Romero. "Statistics for minority students enrolling in agriculture is alarming. We must do better in reaching out to underrepresented groups. Hispanics will impact the future of our society and will have the potential to impact agriculture. We must do a better job of educating and informing Latinos of the opportunities afforded to them in agriculture in order to stay competitive in the marketplace."

The Growing Facts:

► Hispanic population is projected to grow significantly over the next 10 years and into the future. In just three decades, Hispanics are projected to reach 73 million or about 20.1 percent of the entire US population. By 2050, Hispanics will account for over 30 percent of the total population in the United States. (U.S. Census Bureau).

► Economically, Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group. Latinos will be an economic buying powerhouse in the domestic

economy to the tune of almost \$1.4 trillion in 2013. According to the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the University of Georgia, Hispanics experienced a 349 percent increase in purchasing power from 1990 to 2008, compared to 151 percent increase in purchasing power by all non-Hispanic consumers. The Hispanic buying power will be the fastest growing of all groups in the years to come.

► Hispanics are also a relatively young group. The 2006 American Community Survey reported the Hispanic population of 18 years old and younger as 33.8 percent of the total versus a 21.3 percent for the non-Hispanic white population. Hispanics accounted for a low 5.3 percent in the 65 and older group as compared to 15.2 percent of the non-Hispanic white population. In short, the Hispanic population is very young.

► However, based on 2008 data from the Food and Agricultural Education Information System (FAEIS), enrollment data for minorities was alarming. There were a total of 251,422 students enrolled in agricultural related fields with minority students constituting a small percentage. Overall enrollment for Hispanics was 4.5 percent or 11,353 students in 2008. As is evidenced by the FAEIS self-reporting system by colleges and universities, the United States continues to struggle in recruiting students from underrepresented groups into Agriculture, Food, Natural Resources, and Life Sciences.

"We have an emerging demographic that can represent the leaders of tomorrow," said Gil. "With the age of the average farmer increasing, and individuals starting to retire from agricultural careers, there is a gap of talent in the future of agriculture and Latinos could potentially fill that gap; increasing the educational pipeline of students studying agriculture will ensure a pool of present and future employees, consumers, employers and advocates."

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, Edward Avalos, keynote address was about the challenges faced by the USDA and the opportunities it presents to be more efficient in all areas of operation.

"We have roots across all countries with different cultures, customs and backgrounds, but



Former U.S. Congressman Eligio "Kika" de la Garza; Texas NRCS State Outreach Coordinator, Bertha Venegas and NRCS State Conservationist, Salvador Salinas, at the second annual Latinos in Agriculture Leaders Forum in Oct. in San Antonio.

we are united as one, walking as one to build a better future for our nation," said Avalos as he highlighted facts about the growing Hispanic/Latino population and how USDA agencies and programs are diversifying and changing to meet the growing Hispanic customer base. He also told attendees that Hispanics make up 7 percent of the USDA workforce, which is up 1 percent from last year and USDA is committed to working on diversity through cultural transformation efforts.

The highlight of the USDA 150th celebration was the recognition of former U.S. Congressman Eligio "Kika" de la Garza and his wife, Lucille, for their leadership and long time contributions to agriculture by the Latinos in Agriculture. De la Garza served from 1981 to 1994 as chairman of the Agricultural Committee, leading the way in passing bills that reorganized the agricultural lending system, the farm insurance system, the USDA, and pesticide laws. He spoke to attendees about his adventures and lessons learned from his years in south Texas government to Washington D.C. and encouraged the students to follow their dreams.

Master of Ceremonies for the "150-Years of the USDA" celebration, Nancy O'Mallon, CEO of About Harvest, LLC, presented a historical video about "Kika" de la Garza's life and political contributions.

A panel including Texas NRCS State Conservationist, Salvador Salinas, spoke to attendees

Latinos in Agriculture Leaders Forum continued...

about the retiring federal workforce in coming years and NRCS as a career option. Salinas also talked about where the agency is headed in the future of conservation and streamlining efforts.

"In 2005, Hispanics accounted for 11.8 percent of our Texas NRCS workforce," said Salinas. "At the end of fiscal year 2012, Hispanics accounted for 12.89 percent of the Texas NRCS workforce."

The conference wrapped up with a panel of students from Colorado, Minnesota, and Texas who shared their perspective about what it would take to recruit them for higher education and career-wise. Students shared their personal stories about how they became involved in agriculture and what strategies can be considered when recruiting Hispanic students into agriculture.

The consensus from the students was that college can be overwhelming and Hispanic students get lost in the system so a support system is critical to keeping the student enrolled. As far as job recruitment, suggestions include how the student bilingual skills would be utilized and what is expected of the student on the job.

The 3rd Annual *Latinos in Agriculture Leaders Forum* will be held Oct. 11-13, 2013 in San Antonio. For more information, visit <http://latinosinagriculture.org>.

Call for Volunteers

Please respond by February 20, 2013

If you are interested in working on the NOPHNRCSE Facebook page, contact Lori Valadez, communications committee chair, at lori.valadez@mt.usda.gov.

If you are interested in volunteering for the regional activities ad hoc committee, contact roney.gutierrez@fl.usda.gov.

2012 Scholarship Winners!



Alissa E. Castellanos

Albion College, Albion, Michigan

Alissa claims she is a small town girl with big dreams. From Battle Creek, Mich., her big dream is "to make an impact on the world." She's already accomplishing a great deal by playing with an intervarsity volleyball team which also helps out in a local youth camp, volunteering in a group that helps the homeless in her college town, and mentoring a girl in a local elementary school tutoring reading and math skills. Yet, Alissa is reaching beyond her immediate community when she agreed to go on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic last year. Alissa says, "Nothing opens our eyes more than an experience outside our world."

Alissa is studying communications, with a goal in broadcasting and writing. With her enthusiasm, outgoing personality, and developing skills in public affairs, she may end up a successful and effective spokesperson in whatever organization hires her after graduation.



Zuleyka Rodríguez Pagán

Universidad de Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus

Zuleyka is studying agricultural sciences in the Department of Agro-environmental Sciences, Horticulture Program, but at the same time pursuing a second bachelor's degree in psychology. Despite her busy class schedule, she manages to be involved in the college horticulture student association, has worked with victims of domestic violence, participated at various college job fairs and a women's agricultural entrepreneur group, and volunteered on a local farm. Summer of 2011, Zuleyka was hired in the Student Temporary Employee Program (STEP) in Wisconsin, exposing her to the very heart

of NRCS where she put to work what she learned in the classroom. And yet, Zuleyka states, "my greatest achievement is that I'm the first person in my family to attend college."

Zuleyka's experience working with NRCS in Wisconsin has given her further motivation to pursue soil conservation and working for the agency.



María Florentina "Masi" Mejía

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas

María has a "passion for natural resources," a fascination which began at an early age looking at insects, plants and animals. Her professional career began, however, her first day participating in the Texas Youth Hunting Program on the King Ranch in south Texas. A biologist assisting her with the harvest of her first whitetail buck and taking time to teach María all about the deer, as well as assisting her with the dressing of her catch, had a lasting influence on María's future decisions concerning her field of study. She proceeded to attend a wildlife leadership camp where she was fortunate enough

to learn leadership qualities, as well as many facets of natural resources management. She was invited back to the camp for two subsequent summers helping out with the program. María also had an internship with the Texas Parks and Wildlife on the Chaparral Wildlife Management Area.

Spring of 2013, María will be graduating in Environmental Conservation of Natural Resources, minoring in agricultural leadership. Her desire to broaden her education with interdisciplinary skills in natural resources management has included political science as part of her curriculum. She's held leadership positions in the Range, Fish and Wildlife Club and the Society for Conservation Biology, while being enrolled as a full-time student. Finally, with her interest in agriculture and politics, María's aspiration is to be appointed Secretary of Agriculture one day!

Working Effectively with Hispanic Producers

by Jacqueline Padron, Office of Human Resources Management–Diversity, Recruitment, and Work/ Life Division

An NRCS instructor cadre delivered the course —Working Effectively with Hispanic Producers— to almost 30 employees from July 31 through August 2, 2012, in Washington State. NRCS State Conservationist Roylene Rides at the Door hosted the National Employee Development Center's course in Pasco, Washington. The two-and-a-half-day course built employees cultural understanding and competencies and gave them tools to work effectively with the rapidly growing number of Hispanic producers. As part of the course, employees visited local Hispanic producers where they were able to practice the skills they learned in the classroom and gain real-life experience.

"This training was an important opportunity for NRCS-Washington employees to become more familiar with some of our most important agricultural producers," said Rides at the Door. "This course promotes diversity, understanding, and hands-on training. It was time well spent."



Carlos Suarez Appointed to the Senior Executive Service

Carlos Suarez has been appointed to the Senior Executive Service (SES) as State Conservationist for California. Suarez, a native of Puerto Rico, has first-hand knowledge of California's vast natural resources and resource challenges having served as Deputy State Conservationist for California from 2005-2008. Since leaving California, Suarez has been serving as the NRCS State Conservationist of Florida. Earlier career positions included diverse roles in both domestic and international locations including Indiana, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Wisconsin, as well as Mexico and Nicaragua.

Carlos is the fifth Hispanic American to reach the SES level in NRCS and the second from Puerto Rico. We should all celebrate his accomplishment and follow his example to strive for excellence.

We are very proud of you, Carlos!

2012 - 2013 National Council

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La Voz is the official newsletter for the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees. Your ideas, suggestions, comments, and articles are welcome.

Articles may be sent via e-mail as either an MS Word attachment saved as text only, or pasted directly into your email message.

Photographs should be emailed as a separate jpg attachment. Please include a caption for each photo submitted.

Send items to: kristie.wiley@charter.net

The deadline for submitting articles for the spring issue of **La Voz** is **March 15, 2013**.