



LA VOZ

Newsletter of the National Organization of Professional Hispanic
Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees

October 2006 Newsletter

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President's Message

By *Carlos Suarez*

NOPHNRCSE President



Greetings NOPHNRCSE Family! First, I would like to start by thanking you for electing me as your new president. It is an honor to serve as the leader of this great employee organization. I also would like to thank Bertha Venegas and the past National Council for their leadership and commitment during these past two years. They all did an outstanding job!

It has been almost three months since we had our training conference. That doesn't mean we have not begun our work for the next one. In fact, we initiated our planning efforts the day after the end of our very successful training conference in Orlando. As you all know, we will be going to Bloomington, Minnesota in 2007! The training conference will take place at the Marriot Airport hotel from August 5-10, 2007. I am very excited to announce that our training conference will be held in conjunction with the National Leadership Team meeting, which reunites all the state conservationists and NHQ leadership.

Many of you have spoken to the members of the national council about increasing the number and diversity of trainings at the next training conference. I am please to announce

that our planning committee is working with the National Employee Development Center to make this happen. The program committee in coordination with the planning committee is in the final stages of developing the training conference agenda. The agenda will reflect your comments and suggestions for new and diverse training. Make sure you include NOPHNRCSE in your individual development plans (IDP).

One of the goals I have set for the National Council is to address the needs of our members as well as make us attractive to non-members and former members of NOPHNRCSE. We are taking steps to make this happen. First, the national council is developing a business plan for the next two years. This business plan will focus on recruitment of new and former members, career development, marketing and partnerships. You will be requested for input and feedback from your respective regional representative to finalize this plan and make it operational by the end of the year.

I want to thank those who have taken on the responsibilities of leading the different committees. I ask the membership to support these committees by serving as members. There are many committees that still need people. I know that all of you have many responsibilities both at work and at home, so I really appreciate your commitment and support.

I want to end by saying that the National Council wants to hear from you! We want you to tell us what is working, what needs improvement, and any new ideas that you feel should be tried. Use your regional representatives or any other member of the National Council to communicate your ideas. This may sound like a cliché, but I want us to think outside of the box!

I know with your support, we will have a great year!

Join a Committee

By Kris Graham-Chavez, NOPHNRCSE Vice President

Have you ever thought of becoming involved in NOPHNRCSE but don't know how? Becoming a member of a committee is the perfect place to start. You can start by being a member and hopefully after some experience is developed, you can become a committee chair.

There are two groups of committees: standing committees and conference planning committees. Each year the two conduct business through a committee chair and develop a plan of action, budget, and gather a team of members to help complete the action items.

The standing committees are the nucleus of the communications network through which active members are to be kept informed of the items and issues of interest that come to the attention of the organization. Chairs of these committees shall be members of the

organization who are appointed each year by the president, subject to approval of the National Council. Chairpersons shall select their own vice chairperson and secretary. Members and officers of standing and ad hoc committees shall serve from the time of appointment until the following annual meeting of the NOPHNRCSE membership. Each committee will be responsible for developing a plan of action. This plan is due 60 days following appointment of the chairperson and submitted to the National Council.

The conference planning committee is made of a 19-member team. The group is responsible for all activities relating to the conference, such as developing the program, registration, communicating, and marketing the conference, organizing the technical papers, and finding moderators to facilitate sessions. They are also charged with organizing the students, scholarship night, and awards.

Some committees overlap such as the awards, communications, and natural resources.

If you are interested in participating, please call Kris Graham Chavez at 602-280-8842 or e-mail her at kristin.grahamchavez@az.usda.gov.

Duties of standing committees are located in the NOPHNRCSE By-laws -Article V — Committees and NOPHNRCSE Constitution Article X — Elections.

Save These Dates

By Julie MacSwain, 2007 Planning Chair

August 6-10, 2007 marks the dates of the 2007 NOPHNRCSE Conference in Bloomington, Minnesota. This will be the 14th Annual Training Conference for NOPHNRCSE.

The Minneapolis Airport Marriott in Bloomington, Minnesota, is the location where the conference will take place. The National Leadership Team will also meet at the same hotel and will participate with some of the NOPHNRCSE conference!

The Marriott is conveniently located midway between the Twin Cities and minutes from the Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport and the legendary Mall of America. Other nearby attractions include: Fort Snelling, Metrodome, Minnesota Zoo, Science Museum, State Capital, numerous parks, and golf courses.

If you are interested in finding out more information about next summer's conference location, please check out this website: <http://www.bloomingtonmn.org/>.

"Un Gustito" of 2007 NOPHNRCSE Training Conference Program

NOPHNRCSE is pleased to be teaming up with NRCS National Leadership and Hispanic Employment Program Managers for our next annual training conference. This will provide an excellent opportunity for exposure and networking with NRCS leadership.

The program committee is developing a program to meet membership expectations. This is just a sample of potential activities being planned:

- Networking with NRCS Leadership
- 2007 Farm Bill programs and opportunities
- Civil rights and EO
- Challenges and opportunities for Hispanics and NRCS
- Development of leadership skills
- Minnesota conservation work and partnerships
- Training on conservation technologies
- Workshops on diversity, personal development, financial planning, and the NRCS organization
- Development of public speaking skills
- On-site recruitment and hiring

The program committee members are Gilbert Guerrero, National Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager; Juan Carlos Hernandez, Utah Assistant State Conservationist for Operations; and Luis A. Hernandez, Arkansas State Soil Scientist. Please contact any of these people to share ideas and suggestions.

An Opportunity to Become Involved

By Julie MacSwain, 2007 Planning Chair

The 2007 NOPHNRCSE Planning committee chairs have been recently appointed by NOPHNRCSE President Carlos Suarez. If you have an interest in becoming more involved in the planning and successful roll out of next summer's conference, here is your chance!

Several committees are in need of NOPHNRCSE members who are willing and able to put time into planning our conference. If you are interested in lending a helping hand, here is the list of committees and the assigned chairperson! Contact these chairpersons directly if you want to become involved!

- Communications - Lori Valadez
- Program - Luis Hernandez
- Technical Papers/Posters - Arturo Carvajal
- Moderators - Carmella Irwin
- Hospitality - Cresencio Perez
- Exhibits - Ted Lucero

- Auction - Stella Santos
 - Students - Mario Morales
 - Local Arrangements - Michael Squires
 - Awards - Marina Barajas
 - Equipment and Technology - Luis Gamboa
 - Registration - Damarys Mortenson
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2006 NOPHNRCSE Award Winners

The following members were recognized during the 2006 training conference for their outstanding contributions to NOPHNRCSE and/or the Hispanic community.

- Natural Resources Conservation Award - Arturo C. Carvajal, California
 - Hispanic Community Award – Zaragoza Rodriguez III, Texas
 - Outstanding Member Award – Lori B. Valadez, Montana/Texas
 - Leadership Award – Rachel J. Lopez, California
 - Visionary Award – Carmen A. Diaz, Texas
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2006 NOPHNRCSE Scholarship Recipients

Heysha R. Cordero- Moca, Puerto Rico - Ms. Cordero is currently studying General Agriculture at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez. Ms. Cordero is currently working as a student trainee in Montana for NRCS.

Jessie Dyer – Narragansett, Rhode Island - Ms. Dyer is currently a freshman majoring in Environmental Science at the University of Rhode Island and an intern for the NRCS.

Jessica J. Benavides – Laredo, Texas - Ms. Benavides is currently attending Texas A&M University-Kingsville where she is majoring in Agricultural Sciences.

Nicholas H. Estrada – Oakdale, California - Mr. Estrada will be a freshman next year at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, he will be majoring in Forestry and Natural Resources.

Martha Guerra-Arteaga Scholarship Recipient: Shylene Mata - Rego Park, New York - Ms. Mata is currently attending Cornell University and majoring in Natural Resources with a concentration in Policy and Management, and minoring in International Agriculture and Rural Development. She is also applying to an accelerated masters program in Public Affairs at Cornell.

Michigan Work Station for USDA Public Service Scholar

University of Puerto Rico student Frank Velazquez hasn't experienced a Michigan winter yet, but he hopes to.

Mr. Velazquez spent his third summer working for NRCS in Michigan as a USDA Public Service Scholar. When he completes his degree in agronomy, he will go to work for NRCS in Michigan if a position is available.

As a USDA Public Service Scholar, Mr. Velazquez' tuition is paid for in return for the same number of years of service with a USDA agency. He must work at least five years for USDA to repay his scholarship.

When he was selected for the program he submitted a list of states where he would like to work upon graduation. Michigan was the only state outside of the south that he selected and it had agreed to place a student from the program.

"It's a great state," Mr. Velazquez said of his future home. This summer Mr. Velazquez worked in the Kalamazoo County NRCS office in Portage. He spent his last two summers working in Ingham and Washtenaw counties. With its greater variety of crops he has found the "west coast" of Michigan very different from his two previous locations.

The district conservationist for Kalamazoo County, Edwin Almodovar, was also a student at the University of Puerto Rico.

It helps having someone from his home island in the office, said Mr. Velazquez. The transition from speaking Spanish to English takes a couple of weeks, he said.

The staff at the Portage office is making sure that Mr. Velazquez gets a wide variety of experiences during the summer. "I keep learning every single day," Mr. Velazquez said.

Mr. Velazquez learned about the USDA Public Service Scholar program through the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees. While in high school he earned a scholarship to attend the organization's annual meeting in Texas. There he learned about the USDA Public Service Scholar Program. He was one of only four students accepted into the program in 2003.

In addition to his summers in Michigan, Mr. Velazquez has also worked for NRCS in Puerto Rico. There he worked with dairy farmers and farms raising hogs, oranges and coffee.

The farms in Puerto Rico are small compared to Michigan, he said. While not working, Mr. Velazquez reads, works out at a local gym and is taking an online course for college credit.

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General Accountability Office (GAO) Finds Hispanic Under-representation Not Government's Fault

This document is located at <http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0906/092106r1.htm>

Disappointing Hispanic groups, government auditors concluded that a lack of citizenship and education are the primary drivers behind under-representation of Hispanics in the federal workforce -- not neglect or discrimination on the government's behalf.

In a long-anticipated report (GAO-06-932) , which can be found at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06832.pdf> released Wednesday, the Government Accountability Office found that when accounting for citizenship and education, Hispanics were actually 16 percent more likely than similarly educated non-Hispanic citizens to hold jobs in the federal government.

In 2005, Hispanics made up 12.6 percent of the civilian labor force but only 7.4 percent of the federal workforce, following a long trend of under-representation in government. But federal jobs, unlike some private sector opportunities, require U.S. citizenship and, often, higher degrees.

For years, Hispanic groups have decried the gap in private-public Hispanic employment. They argue that it leads to poor policy decisions, less federal money and fewer quality jobs for the Hispanic population.

In August, a coalition of 40 Hispanic groups, called the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, released its own report accusing the Office of Personnel Management of a failure in leadership and an unwillingness to hold agencies accountable for the gap. Two years ago, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus asked the GAO to investigate the disparity.

"We just thought there could be a more thorough study of it, and of course the gold standard usually would be the GAO," Rep. Charles Gonzalez, D-Texas, told Government Executive in June. "It's not that anyone sets out to discriminate; it's just that certain practices and such don't address that particular population."

The NHLA eagerly awaited the GAO's findings.

"We had expected that the report was going to provide once and for all a sweeping look, a broad approach look, to the problems or the issue surrounding this question of Hispanic representation in the federal workforce," said Gilbert Sandate on behalf of the NHLA.

But the GAO's primary recommendation for OPM, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the agencies they oversee, was to take citizenship into account when crunching diversity numbers. Such a move could take pressure off agencies to recruit more Hispanics.

"The GAO report ... minimizes the magnitude and impact of the Hispanic employment crisis," Sandate said. "Most importantly, it fails to provide solutions to address this crisis."

He said the report's focus on two variables is not comprehensive enough. For example, it did not evaluate discrimination as a variable.

"The report does not clarify where Hispanics stand in the federal workforce today," Sandate said. "The statistical model merely estimates the odds of a likely outcome given a set of controlled variables. The GAO has not concluded in its report that Hispanics are underrepresented, are at parity or are overrepresented in today's federal workforce."

He said the coalition likely will ask the caucus to push for congressional hearings on the matter.