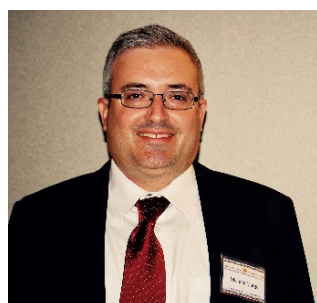




Hispanic Heritage Month: Two Natural Disasters and our Need of Solidarity...pg. 11



Hello NOPHNRCS members,

The last few months have been a challenging time for many of our NOPHNRCS members who have been directly impacted by several natural disasters in Puerto Rico, Florida, Texas, and Mexico. There is a special section in this newsletter on how you can donate to relief efforts. It is a time for us to unite in solidarity with those affected by these natural disasters. Thanks to Janella Cruz and others who shared some credible organizations assisting in relief efforts that are accepting donations.

The National Council has continued to meet despite the stress and concerns of many and I admire their strength. Below is an update on the primary topics the National Council has been working on:

Our **2018 Training Meeting and 25th Anniversary** will be held June 5-9th in San Antonio, Texas! We will once again partner with NEDC to deliver trainings to our membership. NEDC trainings will be held June 5-7th and NOPHNRCS's training event will be held on Friday and Saturday, June 8-9th. NOPHNRCS will host a plenary session, awards luncheon, concurrent trainings, scholarship/auction night, and a banquet celebrating our 25th Anniversary. NEDC training topics are currently being finalized and will be announced soon.

We need members to volunteer to help with planning the meeting. There are vacancies in the following committees: Conference Planning Co-Chair, Registration, Communications, Agenda, Moderators, Auction/Scholarship, Awards, Equipment/Technology, and 25th Anniversary Planning. If you are interested



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My experience with FEMA in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria ...[Page 12](#)

or would like to learn more, please email your regional representative or Bianca Diaz-Deliz at Bianca.Diaz.Deliz@nj.usda.gov.

We are moving closer to finalizing a decision on **updating our Website**. Thanks to Janella Cruz and Tania Nanna who have been diligently investigating all options to revamp our website with a possible new web design that is user-friendly and will meet our organization needs. Please let Janella know if you have experience in web design or are interested in helping out this effort.

In conclusion, I would like to introduce our newest council member, Victor Hernandez, Outreach Coordinator and Sociologist for California. Victor will be serving as our West Regional Representative which covers the states of Alaska, Hawaii, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Arizona, and New Mexico. Thanks Victor and welcome to the family!

We need your help! Please consider volunteering to serve in a committee. *Serving in a committee or on the National Council is one huge opportunity to reap benefits of your membership.* You will develop important leadership, and communication skills that are essential for career advancement.

I hope you have enjoyed the fall colors and talk to you soon!

Michael Margo

NOPHNRCSE President

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New Spotlight Member- Victor Hernández



Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your Western Region NOPHNRCSE representative. As you all may know I am stationed in the California State Office in Davis, as your Outreach Coordinator and Sociologist in the Public Affairs division. I am originally from the city of Santa Maria on the California Central Coast. I love Bar Be Que'ing and my family slogan growing up was "If you can BBQ a Tri Tip, you're not a Hernandez". There my family farmed, worked in the agriculture labor industry and after living through these hardships, I thought to myself, I will never work in agriculture.

So, I began my federal service at the age of 17, while still a junior in high school, I enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. After several deployments and a tour in Iraq, I returned to my home town and began studying Sociology with the intent of becoming a counselor or school teacher. Upon transferring to the University, I became aware of the Student Career Experience Program at the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and attained my loan authority shortly thereafter. While at FSA, I worked through my Masters in Organizational Development, Leadership and Management and soon began teaching at Santa Barbara Business College, a local private college, in the evenings. There I became the department chair, veteran coordinator and lead business instructor, all while maintaining farm loan activities at FSA.

Vice- President Message

- I. *Nomination/ Elections:* *In accordance with article X of the constitution, NOPHNRCS's Nominations/Elections Committee will be conducting the 2017 elections and is looking for members interested in one of the following National Council positions that will become vacant: Vice President, Treasurer and Regional Representatives (South Central and Southeast). This is an opportunity to get exposed to new experiences, challenges and growing opportunities both in a professional and personal level. If this is something that interests you or for more information feel free to contact your regional representative or Executive- Vice President, Rocemi Morales at Rocemi.Morales@oh.usda.gov . See below for roles associated with each position. More information will be sent out for nomination/elections guidelines.*

A. **Regional Representatives**

The major duties of each regional representative shall be to:

1. Serve as an official members of the National Council.
2. Represent membership in their respective administrative regions at national Council meetings.
3. Inform the membership in their respective administrative regions of general and special meetings of the Organization.
4. Present issues and concerns from members within their administrative regions, including amendments to the Organization Constitution and By-Laws.
5. Develop policy/procedures to assist members in their region voice issues, comments, and concerns to the National Council. Develop and maintain working relationship with members of their region in cooperation with NRCS HEPM Regional Reps.

B. **Vice-President**

The major duties of the Vice-President shall be to:

1. Assist the president in the conduct of activities of the Organization.
2. Temporarily perform the duties of the president when the president is absent.
3. Complete the unexpired term of the president in the event that a vacancy occurs.
4. Serve as an official member of the National Council.

Continuation...

My experience up to this point has culminated at NRCS where I am able to engage and counsel one-on-one with our own people and as fate shall have it, I am working in agriculture. I still don't know what I want to do when I grow up, but I'm having loads of fun reaching the summit. I am a new National Employee Development Center (NEDC) instructor for Working Effectively With Hispanic Producers, serve on the CA Urban Task Force, am designated Sociologist and facilitator of the California Farm Demonstration Network and have expanded on my own research titled "Leadership Role in Developing Talent Based Diversity

I could not do any of this on my own, my drive and dedication come from my family, I now live in Sacramento with my lovely bride, Sonia Hernandez, my two daughters Samantha and Sarena and three sons Jhoncarlo, VictorManuel, and Maximillian. I continue to be inspired everyday with the work here at NRCS and look forward to learning from you all.

5. Act as a liaison between the National Council and the chairpersons of the standing Committees.
6. Develop policy/procedures as outlined in Section XI, item C of the Constitution.
7. Responsible for oversight of all Committees, develops a plan of action on operations with all Committee Chairs, provides quarterly committee progress reports to the National Council, develops a communication plan that provides for efficient flow of information between this office and the Committee Chairs.

C. Treasurer

The duties of the Treasurer shall be to:

8. Properly collect membership dues.
Proper collection of dues shall include the annual issuance of bills for collection to all members for subsequent year dues no later than December 1st of each year, the collection of dues from new members, and the issuance of a receipt to members having paid membership dues.
9. Serve as an official of the National Council.
10. Have custody of all funds of the Organization that shall be deposited in savings and checking accounts in a bank approved by the National Council.
11. Maintain a complete and accurate accounting of all funds of the Organization.
12. Maintain a disbursements and withdrawals by checks signed by two officers of the Organization.
13. Submit a report at each regular meeting of the Organization that covers receipts, expenditures, and balance of funds on hand.
14. Make a full financial report at the end of each calendar year, with copies circulated to the membership.
15. Be bonded by the Organization.
16. On a quarterly basis, provide a current membership list, to Regional Reps and National Council. Develop a database that list members by state and region and other information as needed by Regional Reps and National Council. Provide this information to Regional Reps and National Council as requested.

During the membership drive, Treasurer should maintain a close working relationship with Membership Committee Chair.

National Council

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Joxelle Velázquez, MS

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Attentively,

Bianca Diaz-Deliz

NOPHNRCSE Vice-President

South Central Region

Texas NRCS Provides USDA Learning and Career Experiences

By Melissa Blair, USDA-NRCS Public Affairs Specialist



Earth team volunteer and teacher, Antoniette Madrazo, learns about conservation planning.

The USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) partnered with Texas A&M University in Kingsville (TAMU-K) and the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach's Hispanic-Serving Institutions National Program in Texas to provide hands on career experiences for high school and college students, and a teacher this summer.

TAMU-K students, Kassandra Montes worked in the Edinburg NRCS office, while Spencer Smith worked in the Kingsville NRCS office, as Earth Team volunteers for 10 weeks. The opportunity was provided through the university's agriculture department's "Wheel of Change" program that helps students learn about USDA careers.

Two other TAMU-K students had the opportunity to work with NRCS through another program in the agriculture department called START NOW: Students in Agricultural Research Techniques by Novel

Occupational Workshops. Elisha Palomo was a volunteer in the Rosenberg NRCS office and Valerie Ruiz volunteered in the Eagle Pass office for 10 weeks.

“The opportunities provided to our students are changing lives and helping to define their careers,” said Dr. Shad Nelson, TAMU-K professor and dean of the Department of Agriculture, Agribusiness and Environmental Sciences.

USDA-NRCS in Texas also works closely with Ruby De La Garza, education specialist with the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach’s Hispanic-Serving Institutions National Program on outreach and learning opportunities during the year.

“This is the third year the USDA has participated in the Academic Leadership Alliance Summer Education Externship Program,” said De La Garza. “The program provides local high school teachers with a two-week opportunity with state and federal agencies. The teachers use their experiences to develop career in action lesson plans to be used in the classroom with their students. By talking about their experience with USDA, teachers will help develop a pipeline of students entering into food, agriculture, natural resources and STEM careers.”

Antoniette Madrazo who teaches sophomore chemistry at La Joya Palmview High School in Mission, Texas was selected for the Academic Leadership Alliance (ALA) Summer Education Externship Program to work with NRCS for two weeks in Edinburg. She developed lesson plans from what she learned with the NRCS to use in her classroom.

“It was an eye opener to realize the complexity involved in preparing conservation plans for management and financial assistance for all of us to enjoy the benefits of productive soil, safe and clean water and thriving cattle and abundant produce,” said Madrazo.

Two students were selected through the USDA Agricultural Ambassador Program (AAP), Sabrina Cano, a junior at Pharr San Juan Alamo (PSJA) North High School and Tyler Denny, a junior at McAllen High School.

The USDA Agricultural Ambassador Program is a partnership between the Office of Advocacy and Outreach’s Hispanic-Service Institutions National Program and the University of Texas–Rio Grande Valley (UT-RGV) to provide high school students with an internship with USDA for five weeks (20 hours per week) during the summer. After completing the program, Ambassadors represent USDA at their respective high schools and serve as a resource to students interested in agricultural-related fields.

Denny competed at the American Junior Simmental Association National Classic this summer, where he participated in the public speaking contest. One of Denny’s topics was: “How can a farmer keep and run a sustainable farm?”

“My experiences with NRCS really helped me prepare for my public speaking contest in the 30 minute time slot and answer questions from the judges,” said Denny. “Out of more than 100 Intermediate Public Speaker contestants, I placed 5th. I do believe that my time with NRCS helped me achieve this.”

All the volunteers agree they would recommend volunteering at USDA-NRCS to learn more about career

opportunities and what the agency does in providing conservation technical assistance and financial programs to help farmers and ranchers voluntarily improve their land which benefits all Texans.

Growing Together, Creciendo Juntos

By Bertha T. Venegas



Guerrera Ranch - participants tour the Guerra Ranch during the Texas Hispanic Farmer and Rancher Conference.

The Spanish architecture of the Casa de Palmas Renaissance Hotel built in 1918 welcomed participants to the first Texas Hispanic Farmer and Rancher Conference held September 14-15 in McAllen. A fitting venue for the kick off of Hispanic Heritage Month, the “Growing Together, Creciendo Juntos” conference focused on the accomplishments of Hispanic farmers and ranchers and the exchange of information from agriculture agency experts who provided both technical and real life experiences to conference participants.

The USDA- Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in partnership with The National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) was instrumental in bringing this conference to fruition. Southern Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SSARE) joined in as the third key partner in this endeavor.

Addressing the opening plenary session for NRCS was Tomas Dominguez, assistant state conservationist for field operations, who emphasized that, “outreach to a growing Hispanic population is important now more than ever with the latest Agriculture Census showing a 21 percent increase in the number of Hispanic producers from 2007 to 2012. Texas has the highest number of Hispanic principal operators in the nation with 34,624.”

The conference focused on four key tracks that included urban farming, ranching, farming and SSARE on-farm research and education presentations. The conference offered both plenary sessions and breakout sessions. One plenary session included women producers describing their struggles and successes in agriculture. The panel included Diana Padilla with Yahweh’s All Natural Farm and Garden and Patricia Garza with PPC Farms. Garza is a vegetable producer in the Mission area and spoke of the availability of funding sources for agriculture producers but emphasized to participants, “to close the gap between the USDA institutions and agriculture producers by doing research and meeting with USDA officials before applying, and that it is a lengthy process that requires much persistence.”

The conference also offered the opportunity for participants to attend field tours. The tours included PPC Farms, the Guerra Ranch, and Terra Preta Farm. Gerardo “Jerry” Guerra from the Guerra Ranch talked to participants about the benefits that a high stock density operation would have on the land and its requirements. The conference concluded with a panel of agency and organization speakers answering questions for all participants about their respective programs.



HESTEC - USDA led four breakout sessions for Hispanic Engineering, Science and Technology (HESTEC) Educator day at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. The sessions featuring Dr. Wilson (Future Scientist Program) and NRCS Soil Conservationist Jessica Paredes. Fifty teachers participated in the two breakout sessions conducted by NRCS to learn about the agency and STEM career opportunities within the agency.

Northeast Region

Bilingual Workshops Teach Weed Identification, Scouting, and Integrated Weed Management

By Gisela Carmeaty and Zenik Crespo

This summer, Penn State Extension and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) collaborated to provide bilingual training to English and Spanish speaking farmers and agricultural workers in western Pennsylvania. This project was supported by a Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop block grant titled “Sustainable Production and Pest Management Innovations for Next Generation Young and Hispanic/Latino Specialty Crop Growers, project number ME44166076.



Thirty people attended two workshops on weed identification and weed scouting; Spanish was the primary language for five participants. The first workshop was held on July 27th at Harvest Valley Farms in Gibsonia, a fruit and vegetable farm that has hosted meetings for beginning and establishing farmers in the area since 2015. The second workshop was held on August 30th at Johnston's Evergreen Nursery near Erie, and included Hispanic crew workers from this large nursery operation. Penn State Extension Educator Lee Stivers facilitated the hands-on sessions on weed identification and scouting. USDA NRCS Natural Resource Specialist Gisela Carmeaty –Martinez (at Harvest Valley Farms) and Area Resource Conservationist Zenik Crespo (at Johnston's Nursery) presented information about the technical services and cost sharing programs offered by NRCS. Gisela and Zenik also served as translators for Spanish-speaking participants.

Growers use Penn State Extension's Stubborn Weeds of Pennsylvania to identify weeds at Harvest Valley Farms in Gibsonia. Photo: L. Stivers.

At the beginning of each workshop, participants walked through production fields and gathered samples of weeds they found, including ones they recognized and ones they did not. Penn State Extension provided a color copy of the *Stubborn Weeds of Pennsylvania* and *Malezas de Pennsylvania* (Spanish version) guide. Participants worked together to identify a variety of weeds, including annuals, perennials, grasses, sedges and broadleaf weeds. This hands-on activity sparked lively discussions about how to control weeds in different production systems, and about invasive weeds to watch for, such as Palmer amaranth. Lee presented recommendations on how and when to scout for weeds, how to use scouting information as part of an integrated weed management strategy, and general considerations for control of annual, biennial and perennial weeds.

To wrap up the session, Gisela and Zenik presented information about the NRCS technical and financial assistance programs. Information about technical assistance was discussed, including the importance of having a conservation plan and the



Gisela Carmenaty (right) describes services and resources available to growers through USDA NRCS. Photo: L. Stivers

benefits of identifying current and potential resource concerns in the operation. For the cost-shared financial assistance programs, general eligibility and overview of the application process was presented. Also conservation practices were reviewed: conservation cover crops, seasonal high tunnels, integrated pest management, pollinator habitat/seeding just to mention a few.

Results of a short post-workshop survey show that participants gained important knowledge about weed identification and management, and that they intend to use this information to improve

production and profits at their operations.



Zenik Crespo (back, right) assists Hispanic participants as they identify weeds at Johnston's Evergreen Nursery in Erie. Photo: L. Follett

In addition, individual participants commented that they would use the information from the workshop to identify weeds on their operations, time herbicide applications for better control, scout earlier to catch weeds in seedling stages, and involve workers more in weed control plans.

Workshop host Lori Follett, of Johnston's Evergreen Nursery, confided that her workers felt especially appreciated and valued by being included in the workshop. Lori followed up with this message: "Thank you very much for having the

weed ID and scouting meeting yesterday. We enjoyed it very much. I received some very positive feedback from four Hispanic crew workers who attended. We very much appreciate the translation as well. I hope this is the first of many.”

Hispanic Heritage Month: Two Natural Disasters and our Need for Solidarity

By Janella Cruz



On September 19 an earthquake with a 7.1 magnitude struck 2.8 miles from the populated areas in Mexico City as well as in the states of Puebla, Mexico and Morelos as informed by authorities. The death toll sadly continues to rise but the support from soldiers and civilians working hard around the clock has increased rescue and recovery efforts.

Puerto Rico:

On September 20 after days of anticipation Hurricane Maria made

landfall in Puerto Rico with wind speeds of 155mph making it a category 4 storm affecting all 3.4 million people. With the most powerful hurricane since San Felipe in 1928 the wrath of Maria has left catastrophic damages with lack of electricity and communication throughout the island. The US Virgin Islands have also suffered damages as well as the island of Dominica. With lack of communication as an impediment, providing relief to the people will be a slow process.

Given the natural events that have devastated both Puerto Rico and Mexico in the past week we will remain vigilant and continue to provide updates in the relief efforts and in doing have strength through solidarity.

A mural from artist Yasmin Hernandez called Soldaderas which signify the unity of two Nations.

Donate to Help Communities Recover and Rebuild

https://chci.org/newsroom/donate_to_help_communities_recover_and_rebuild/

Midwest Region

My experience with FEMA in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria

By Urayoan Diaz-Pacheco

My most cordial greetings and respect to all Puerto Ricans who live on the island. During the past days I had the opportunity to work a Deployment with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in



Urayoán Díaz-Pacheco and Jorge Lugo-Camacho at Bo Maraguez, Ponce PR

PR. My arrival on the island was on September 29, 2017 approximately 9 days after the passage of Hurricane Maria. Like every Puerto Rican living outside the island, I was also devastated to not know anything about my family and the video footage of the aftermath I saw was not very encouraging. The arrival to the island was very overwhelming. As the plane approached Puerto Rico it was shocking the devastation of trees and houses. As soon as we got off the plane I felt an

indescribable heat, and while we walked by the airport we were received with applause and an expression of gratitude. Even so, the face of frustration was noticeable in the faces of the people waiting in long lines to board the plane.

Our mission was to register all the survivors, in order for them to receive the benefits of FEMA. I was working in several towns such as Yauco, Ponce,



Bo. Mameyes, Jayuya PR – 13 days after Maria



Bo. Ranchera, Yauco, PR - 35 days after Maria

Guánica, Lares, Adjuntas, Jayuya, Villalba and Utuado where I helped hundreds of wonderful people. Many of them with terrifying stories which brought me to tears and put a knot in my heart. Despite this, there are many stories and pleasant memories that I had during the 45 days of service, where I also shared with people like Jorge Lugo-Camacho, (State Soil Scientist, Columbia, MO), James Rodriguez (Soil Conservationist, Yadkinville, NC) and a number of colleagues from different agencies, such as NASA, VA, USCG, USDA, ICE, CBP and others.

Although there is still a lot of work to be done and my enormous desires to continue helping to raise PR I had to return to work, but undoubtedly my thoughts, soul and heart remained in La Isla del Encanto.

West Region

NRCS, Partners Help Latino Farmers Grow Together

By Christine Chavez



The NRCS and the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT), a nonprofit organization serving farmers and ranchers, have teamed up to host the 3rd Annual Latino Farmer Conference. The conference will be held at the UC Riverside Palm Desert Center in Palm Desert, California, on November 7.

The partnership is excited to host the third annual conference in the Coachella Valley as there are hundreds of Latino farmers in the area. According to the latest agricultural census, there are over 2,800 registered Latino/Hispanic farmers in Southern California. This number includes farmers in San Diego, Imperial, Riverside and Ventura counties. Latino farmers are now growing at twice the rate of the traditional farmer. USDA leadership has identified these farmers as being historically underserved.

The past two conferences have attracted over 300 farmers, agricultural students, farm-related organizations and businesses. The conference is unique because it is presented in Spanish, with available translation to English. There are workshops, panel discussions and networking opportunities throughout this one-day event. The workshops focus on the latest information and technology in sustainable agricultural practices, conservation, farm business and financial resources for California farmers.

Past workshop topics included irrigation and irrigation water management, soil health, water conservation, business planning and marketing, integrated pest management, beekeeping, food safety and post-harvest handling practices.

For more information on the 2017 conference, visit <https://latinofarmerconference.ncat.org/>.

Location:	Dates:
Fresno, CA	2/6-8, 2018
State College, PA	4/10-12, 2018
San Antonio, TX	6/5-7, 2018
Charlotte, NC	7/17-19, 2018
Tucson, AZ	8/28-30, 2018

Region	Representative	Phone	Email
Caribbean area	Yadira Feliciano	787-834-1480, ext.111	Yadira.feliciano@pr.usda.gov
East	Janella Cruz	518-327-3774, ext. 3	Janella.cruz@ny.usda.gov
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South Central	Flavio Garza	956-723-6643, ext. 3	Flavio.Garza@tx.usda.gov
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West	Victor Hernandez	530-792-5628, ext. 3	Victor.hernandez@ca.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 1st.
- 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 NOPHNCSE and PayPal. For PayPal payments please contact Edgar Cantu edgar.cantu@ri.usda.gov