



**2018 NOPHNCSE-NEDC Joint Leadership and Technical Training ...pg.9**

**Hello NOPHNCSE Family!**



Our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference is right around the corner! We will be *Commemorating 25 Years of Hispanic Advancement and Building for the Future* in San Antonio, TX June 8-9! The Conference Planning Team has been busy getting everything ready. I can't thank them enough for all the time and effort they dedicated. Serving on a planning committee helps members develop necessary skills needed to prosper within our agency (organization, time management, communication, critical thinking). Consider joining a conference planning committee or one of our standing committees.

Back to our 2018 Conference: Three concurrent trainings will be offered: Career Development and Networking/Outreach, SEPM, and Soil Health. The Ray T. Margo Awards Luncheon and Scholarship/Auction night will occur on Friday, June 8. Numerous NOPHNCSE members will be receiving well deserved awards. Eldonna Lewis Fernandez, award winning speaker, will deliver our keynote address. The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Banquet will be on Saturday evening June 9<sup>th</sup>. Right now we have eight Past Presidents of NOPHNCSE who will be attending. Some lively entertainment is being planned! It's going to be an outstanding conference. I look forward to visiting with many of you in San Antonio.

In other news, I would like to thank our Website Planning Team: Janella Cruz, Misha Vargas, Tania Nanna, Timothy Garrahan, Rocemi Morales, Bianca Diaz-



*Celebrating Women's History Month  
Texas Native Blazes Trails in Home State and Florida...pg 4*



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Deliz, Victor Hernandez, Edgar Cantu, Flavio Garza, and Joxelle Velasquez for the outstanding work on upgrading our website. They worked with WordwrightWeb in upgrading the site. If you haven't seen it yet, please check it out: <https://nophnrcse.org/>.

Members can pay dues online and have access to member only information. The website will be continuously getting updated with important news.

Please see the rest of the announcements in this newsletter in regards to calls for auction items, conference photos, and other topics related to the conference.

That's all I have for now. See you in San Antonio!

Sincerely,

Michael Margo  
NOPHNRCSE President

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## New Spotlight Member - Michael Pérez



My name is Michael Galiano Pérez, originally from Hormigueros, Puerto Rico. As a hobby I enjoy exercising, since last summer I've added biking as new activity to my regular routine. I also used to practice Hawaiian Kenpo Karate in which I achieved 3rd degree black belt. I graduated from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus in June of 2015 with a degree in Animal Sciences.

Two years ago I moved to Marshall Minnesota having a job offer with the NRCS. It was really exciting and a great opportunity to start my professional career. I've been working for the agency as a Soil Conservationist at the Marshall, MN field office.

## National Council

### **President**

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### **South Central Region Representative**

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### **West Region Representative**

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### **Southeast Region Representative**

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## Continuation...

It's been a great learning experience and again, a great opportunity to see everything that we as an agency do to help farmers help the land. Recently I got selected as the SEPM for Asian/American Pacific Islanders and I'm really excited to start promoting diversity in the agency. This is just the beginning of a great learning experience to keep improving myself and keep helping others.

If you'd like to submit an article for the next "La Voz" 2018 summer issue please get in touch with [misha.vargas@me.usda.gov](mailto:misha.vargas@me.usda.gov).  
**Deadline: July 18, 2018.**

## South Central Region

### *Celebrating Women's History Month*

#### **Texas Native Blazes Trails in Home State and Florida**

#### **By Debra Parsons, Winter Garden Soil & Water Conservation District**

By Debra Parsons, Winter Garden SWCD Secretary and JM Villarreal, District Conservationist, Zavala County



While passing through Piedras Negras, Mexico many years ago, Guadalupe Berrones noticed a long line of people standing outside a rundown building with its garage door propped open. It was a Mexican restaurant, the only restaurant for many miles, selling tacos. The tacos did not taste very good, but the thought of owning and operating her own restaurant was a powerful vision Berrones carried away with her that day.

Born in Crystal City, Berrones was raised along with her nine siblings north of La Pryor on the Holiday Farm, where her father was employed. Each year from third grade until graduating from high school,

Berrones and her family would migrate north during the summer months to either Minnesota or North Dakota hoeing sugar beets. “I loved spending time with my family during the summer months; we were together day and night,” said Berrones.

While studying business and management at St. Edwards University in Austin, Berrones was invited to an anniversary celebration in Florida. It was there that she met Cesar, her future husband. “It was love at first sight. We were married and became Christians along the way,” said Berrones.

About two years later, in 1987, Berrones started her first restaurant south of Miami from the ground up. She rented a vacant building, hired a cook and in less than a year, Casita Tejas was opened. Berrones gives credit to community leaders who helped her because they wanted her to succeed as well as her husband Cesar, who quit his construction job to assist with the restaurant duties.

Longing to be with her family in Texas again, Berrones purchased 54-acres of land in 2005 with a house from the Nueces River Ranch near Crystal City. “Our land is right on the river; I love the tranquility it provides. I started a cow-calf operation that family members assist me with while I am in Florida,” said Berrones.

As her restaurant business was booming, Berrones purchased a second restaurant south of Miami, and then a third. With the demanding workload, she was unable to spend quality time with her family. She made the decision to sell one of her restaurants.

In 2014, Berrones purchased a 152-acre ranch north of La Pryor was purchased. She came to the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Winter Garden Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) for assistance in improving land efficiency and protecting the natural resources.

NRCS District Conservationist, J. M. Villarreal developed a conservation plan to line out a plan of conservation practices that could benefit the land. To help implement these practices, Berrones was able to utilize the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) which is a farm bill program that will assist with the costs of implementing the conservation practices. On the Crystal City ranch, Villarreal assisted Berrones with cross-fencing, biomass planting (buffelgrass), livestock pipeline and implementing rotational grazing for her cattle. With little to no forage for the cattle to graze, Villarreal recommend cross fencing to address the soil erosion issues as well as biomass planting.

“It was very important to me to preserve the water quality of the Nueces River; the cross-fencing also keeps the river’s beauty intact, and my cattle from traveling downstream,” said Berrones.

At the La Pryor ranch, cover crops (oats and barley), brush management and prescribed grazing for her cattle and goats were implemented.

“Brush management has been a successful tool in addressing the degraded plant condition,” said Villarreal.

Pending practices include biomass planting. A third 76-acre ranch located west of La Pryor was purchased in 2017. The purpose in buying the third ranch is to harvest hay for the cattle. The combined ranches now carry about 100 head of cattle.

“I love Texas beef! You cannot get this quality of beef in or around my home in Homestead, Florida. I purchase most of the beef for my personal use in Florida from an area meat market here in Texas. The meat is so fresh,” said Berrones. “My goal is to grow grass-fed cattle at my ranches and one day soon transport my own beef to my restaurants and other markets.”

Berrones splits her time between Texas and Florida. Whether it is buying or selling cattle, ranches or restaurants, this entrepreneur is quick to credit others for her success. Assisting her father with raising goats at an early age, she credits him for instilling her motivational drive, strong work ethic and love of animals. Starting with a vision she had many years ago outside of Piedras Negras, she also credits owning and operating successful restaurants to 31 years of hard work and dedication.

Berrones said, “I credit any successes I have to the many blessings God has given me. I could not have done it without my husband Cesar and my family – family is the most important.”

*In celebration of Women’s History Month, the Winter Garden SWCD wanted to share the story of one of its female producers. For more information on how NRCS can assist you with your land management goals, please contact J. M. Villarreal at (830) 374-3838, extension 3 or visit the local office at 319 N 1<sup>st</sup> Ave., Suite 2 in Crystal City.*

## Honoring Earth Team Volunteers

By Melissa Blair



NRCS honored Earth Team volunteers for National Volunteer Week April 15-21, 2018. Texas NRCS recognized students from Texas A&M Kingsville University who spent 10 weeks working with NRCS last summer. Dr. Maria Consuelo Donato Molina, Texas A & M University Kingsville Agricultural Dept., and Texas NRCS State Earth Team Coordinator, Melissa Blair, recognize student volunteers, Elisha Paloma and Spencer Smith. Not pictured are Kassandra Montes and Valerie Ruiz. The students’

intern with NRCS through a collaborative partnership program to empower underrepresented students, through excellence in the plant and soil sciences, to build careers addressing the USDA-NIFA Priority Science Areas.

# Northeast Region

## Seven Months After Hurricane Maria

By Misha Vargas

Photos by Joxelle Velázquez

Devastation is still the word that best describes the situation of a portion of residents from the beautiful island of Puerto Rico.

For the past month and a half I spent most of my time in a town named Utuado where people breath hope, give of what they have and live proud of what they are. Very humble and grateful for being alive, with tears in their eyes telling the story of the scariest times they've lived. Sad to say that I found many communities still without power, filling buckets of water with springs from the high mountains, walking with skin of leather withstanding any temperature.

"I'm alive and for that I'm grateful" was the phrase that I most heard on my daily work routine. Seeing this every single day was pretty overwhelming, not easy to watch and I can't imagine how it could've been to live through it... "It was like a monster was taking over the island, is this ever going to end?" stories and more stories trapped in my heart.

It was during this time that I felt so fortunate to have what I have. Puerto Rico smells like struggle, rebuild, hard work, hope, clean air, and yet it is still seen as a picture of a missing person.



# Western Region

## Ag & Natural Resources in the Classroom

By Shanna Bernal-Fields, Soil Scientist in the Ontario, OR MLRA Office

The Ag & Natural Resources in the Classroom event hosted at Treasure Valley Community College on March 6, 2018 brought well over 500 students (mostly 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders) from the region to talk about Agriculture and Natural Resources. The crowd of students was broken up into 14 groups and rotated to a variety of stations. Presenters included BLM, Rodeo, Dairy, Beef, Tractor safety, Weeds, Fish, Wildlife, Horse Production, Ag Olympics, and our very own NRCS booth. The NRCS booth was staffed by Shanna Bernal-Fields, Soil Scientist in the Ontario, Oregon MLRA office. Shanna taught the students a brief Soils 101 covering what soil is, its functions, the five soil forming factors, and reasons why we need to conserve our soil. Students left the booth with a better understanding of the importance of soil and Mighty Mini Microbe soil books and NRCS temporary tattoos featuring native species.



Shanna Bernal-Fields



Students from Oregon and Idaho that attended the regional event

## NRCS help has been truly appreciated

By Jose Rodriguez, Soil Conservationist, NV

Hi guys, my name is Jose Rodriguez and I am a Soil Conservationist in a small town of Fallon, NV. I am originally from Puerto Rico. As we know the island of Puerto Rico was hit hard by category 5 Hurricane Maria about 8 months ago. As an NRCS employee I didn't have the opportunity to go on a detail to help my island but, instead I had a great idea of taking 3 weeks of leave to see my family and be in this place where I call home. In reality I ended up donating about 25 hrs. a week working for the NRCS Field Office in Juana Diaz PR to help them with the emergency workload that they

have. This was one of the most gratifying and rewarding experiences I've had. I worked with producers that up until now haven't recovered from the impact of hurricane Maria and others who have received help from our programs. Now, although I saw the damage I had the opportunity to see the resilience of the people, I know they will get back up. The community of Puerto Rico is very grateful of our help and everything we've done. This made the biggest impact for me, having a producer stand in front of the field office staff and say: "Thank you for all you have done to help me get back up". Those words made us proud of the work



High Tunnel affected by Hurricane Maria



that everyone did, we witnessed the appreciation of the producers. The words and actions of the field office staff and Puertorrican people made me proud to be part of the NRCS agency.



*After Obstruction Removal provided by NRCS  
Juana Diaz, PR*

## 2018 Conference News

June 8-9, [DoubleTree by Hilton](#), San Antonio, TX

*Commemorating 25 Years of Hispanic Advancement and Building for the Future*

## Register Now!

Download Form [Here](#)

## Draft [Program](#)

## Call for Auction Items

The Scholarship and Endowment Committee will host a scholarship auction night on Friday, June 8th. All proceeds will support the scholarship and endowment fund. We encourage members and guests to consider donating items to help support students and/or members of the future! You can bring the items with you or have them mailed prior to the meeting. Please send an email to Angel Domenech at [angel.domenech@ky.usda.gov](mailto:angel.domenech@ky.usda.gov) with the description of your item to be donated by **June 4<sup>th</sup>**.

For more information including shipping address please [click here](#).

## Call for Photos & Items from Past Conferences

The 25th Anniversary Committee will take a trip down memory lane during the Anniversary Banquet on Saturday evening June 9th. If you have any digital pictures or "vintage" scanned photos from

past conferences please email them Kris Graham Chavez at [Kristin.Grahamchavez@nm.usda.gov](mailto:Kristin.Grahamchavez@nm.usda.gov) by **June 4th.**

Also, if you plan on attending and have items from past conferences such as old programs, photo albums, pins, goody bags, etc., please bring them with you to display on a dedicated table during the Conference.



*1999 Awards Banquet in Las Vegas, Nevada.*

## Call for Testimonials

As part of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Banquet on Saturday evening June 9 at the [DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel](#) in San Antonio, TX we will be presenting member testimonials through a PowerPoint Presentation. *Even though you may not be able to attend the conference we encourage you to submit your testimonial!*

Requested Information:

1. Photo of yourself
2. Quote finishing the statement "I joined....."
3. Year you joined organization

Email requested items to Rebecca de la Torre at [Rebecca.delaTorre@az.usda.gov](mailto:Rebecca.delaTorre@az.usda.gov) by June 5<sup>th</sup>.

Example of profile to be presented during 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Banquet:



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, 2018 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: Contact Tim Garrahan. Once website is running payments will be able to be made online.

Region	Representative	Phone	Email
Caribbean area	Yadira Feliciano	787-834-1480, ext.111	<a href="mailto:Yadira.feliciano@pr.usda.gov">Yadira.feliciano@pr.usda.gov</a>
East	Janella Cruz	518-327-3774, ext. 3	<a href="mailto:Janella.cruz@ny.usda.gov">Janella.cruz@ny.usda.gov</a>
Midwest	Diana Avellanet	269-467-6336, ext.3	<a href="mailto:Diana.avellanet@mi.usda.gov">Diana.avellanet@mi.usda.gov</a>
Northern plains	Roberto Luciano	701-463-2851, ext. 244	<a href="mailto:Roberto.Luciano@nd.usda.gov">Roberto.Luciano@nd.usda.gov</a>
South Central	Flavio Garza	956-723-6643, ext. 3	<a href="mailto:Flavio.Garza@tx.usda.gov">Flavio.Garza@tx.usda.gov</a>
South East	Joxelle Velazquez	601-483-6336, ext.113	<a href="mailto:Joxelle.velazquez@ms.usda.gov">Joxelle.velazquez@ms.usda.gov</a>
West	Victor Hernandez	530-792-5628, ext. 3	<a href="mailto:Victor.hernandez@ca.usda.gov">Victor.hernandez@ca.usda.gov</a>

