



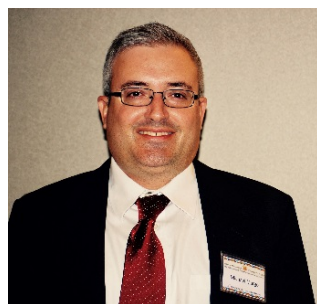
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Hello NOPHNCSE members,

Hello NOPHNCSE Family,

Happy 25th Anniversary! It has been 25 years since the interim Organization held its first official Annual Training Conference in San Antonio, TX, and formally became the National Organization of Professional Soil Conservation Service (SCS) Employees with the naming of its first National Council and the ratification of its Constitution and By-Laws. This occurred after almost two years of dialogue between several SCS Hispanic Employment Program Managers and other Agency employees who met on May 20, 1992 in Albuquerque, NM, and reached consensus to work together to begin the forming of an employee organization that would serve as an advocacy group for Hispanic employees of the SCS.

In the 25 years of NOPHSCSE/NOPHNCSE's existence, it has evolved into an employee organization dedicated to the recruitment retention, development, and advancement of our Hispanic NRCS employees and to outreach efforts within our Hispanic communities (from NOPHNCSE – A Historical Perspective by Humberto Hernandez, www.nophncse.org).

We return to San Antonio, TX **June 5-9 for our 2018 NOPHNCSE-NEDC Training Series!** Our training and organizational meetings will take place at the [DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel San Antonio Downtown](#). NEDC will host four trainings June 5-7 and we will hold our organizational meetings and trainings June 8-9. The plenary session, Ray T. Margo Awards Luncheon, and Scholarship/Auction night will be held on Friday, June 8th. On Saturday, June 9th we will hold our business meeting and our 25th Anniversary banquet and closing ceremony. In between these events,



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NOPHNRCSE members will be networking and attending either the Career Development and Network/Outreach, Soil Health Workshop, or SEPM training sessions. For complete course descriptions please see the recently posted [National Bulletin](#).

Meeting information will be disseminated via email, Facebook, and through *La Voz* at this time. We ask members to please be patient as we are in the process of updating our website. We will post meeting information on the new website as soon as it's up and running. Members can still renew their membership by downloading the [membership form](#) and mailing a check to our Membership Chair, Tim Garrahan since the login portal on our website is currently not functioning.

The Training Planning Team is busy planning an outstanding event. If you wish to be a part of this memorable event please do not hesitate to contact me directly or through your regional representative. We have many opportunities to become involved. Stay tuned for more information!

Sincerely,

Michael Margo
NOPHNRCSE President

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New Spotlight Member - Jose Rodríguez



My name is José Rodríguez, I'm a Soil Conservationist in Fallon Service Center, Nevada. I'm originally from Puerto Rico, graduated from the University of Puerto Rico with a degree in agronomy. As a student, I started as an Earth Team Volunteer in Puerto Rico. After this opportunity I got selected a few years later as a pathways student in Michigan and, later on I was selected as a full time employee. I also have experience as an agronomist working for a private company where I acquired skills that help me in my today job. While in Michigan I had the opportunity to learn more about conservation in the east side of the US, especially forestland.

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2018 NOPHNRCSE Scholarship Announcement

The National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (NOPHNRCSE) has the mission to motivate and mentor members for leadership roles to assist NRCS and partners in delivering natural resources conservation. Following our mission, NOPHNRCSE is proud to present the 2018 NOPHNRCSE scholarship program.

This year NOPHNRCSE will award a total of three \$1,000.00 academic scholarships to qualified students that are pursuing a degree in Agriculture, Natural Resources, or Natural Resources Conservation related field of study at an accredited school of higher education.

Continuation...

I also had the opportunity to serve as the American Indian Alaska Native Special Emphasis Program Manager. On the fall of 2017 I transferred to Nevada looking for improvement in my professional development by learning to work in new and diverse areas. I currently hold the Black Special Emphasis Program Manager position in Nevada and I'm working towards helping the state's civil rights committee to fulfil our diversity goals. I am really happy to have the opportunity to join NOPHNRCSE, I am looking forward to learn new things in my position and inside NOPHNRCSE as well as helping all the people I can.



Joel Alicea-Hernández, I'm from San Germán, Puerto Rico. During my college years, while pursuing a degree in Agronomy, in the summer of 2012 I had the opportunity to work in Wahpeton, North Dakota at the NRCS field office through the Pathway Program. It was my first time traveling out of my country; and even though it was long ways from home and the language barrier, I caught and got better every day, however, it was a great enriching experience. After that

South Central Region

Victor Lopez

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

Rancher Victor Lopez is known in his part of Texas by his company, Lopez Health Systems, and his long standing community involvement, including the dedication of the Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC) Victor H. Lopez Library and Study Center in Crystal City. However, what most do not know about Lopez is his steadfast commitment to being a good land steward. Lopez served on the Winter Garden Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) board of directors for 15 years from 1998 to 2013 in Zavala County. During his time as a board member, Victor promoted the various programs the SWCD had to offer through its partnership with the USDA-NRCS. Lopez participated in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) to improve his land and natural resources. "The technical and financial assistance I received from NRCS has been invaluable," Victor stated.

Victor started with a brush management practice at his ranch, Rancho La Fe. "My land was overrun with mesquite, so brush management was my first priority. I then ventured into range seeding and grazing management. I went from zero grass to great forage not only for my cattle, but also for the local wildlife, most noticeably the quail population. I continue to reap the rewards from implementing these conservation practices."

Continuation...

opportunity I returned back home to finish my Bachelor's degree and worked a few years for the private sector.

After that opportunity I returned back home to finish my Bachelor's degree and worked a few years for the private sector.

In November, 2016 I returned to U.S joining the NRCS Minnesota Team and since then I've been working as a Soil Conservationist at Waseca County, Steele County and now Freeborn County. A job that I have really enjoyed, because it gives me the opportunity to get involved directly with farmers and producers. We can learn about their resource concerns, and design a plan to work towards solving them.

All things considered, my position as a Conservationist is a good experience that allows me to develop ideas, keep growing as a professional and serve others.



Pictured Left: Victor and NRCS District Conservationist J. M. Villarreal find green blades of grass. Pictured Right: Victor and J. M. overlook brush management progress. Pictured Center: Victor continues to support the SWCD in various ways.

Educating our youth about protecting our soils

By Juan A. Saenz



In the above photo Juan Saenz is explaining how old some of the soils are and how long it takes to form one inch of soil, and why it is so important to protect our soils.

“I feel it is important to teach our children to be great stewards of the land. After all they are our future.”

The students were great listeners and were extremely happy to hear the presentation. Some students felt inspired to help protect our soils, as well as wanting to become future Soil Scientists.

Their favorite part of the presentation was learning about the places I have traveled and seen along the way, learning that soil is different everywhere you go, and that soil behaves differently in different environments.

Some of the questions asked by the students were: what are your responsibilities, what type of education is required to do my job, what are some cool facts about my job, and why did you choose this career?

Some memorable quotes from the students were:

“I want to be a scientist when I grow up, I want to do what you do when I grow up.”

“Your job is awesome.”

I look forward to continuing my presentations with more schools and in all areas in South Texas.

Texas NRCS shared conservation assistance opportunities at two large organic conferences in Texas during Jan. and Feb. 2018 that reached beginning, socially disadvantaged, veteran and women producers. Jessica Benavides-Paredes, soil conservationist (left) and Bertha Venegas, statewide outreach coordinator (right), presenting at workshops.



[Cite your source here.]

Northeast Region

Working Together in Puerto Rico

By Janella Cruz



Janella, Alvin and Jacky describing a soil profile

On September 20, 2017, category 4, hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands leaving catastrophic damages affecting millions of Puerto Rican U.S. citizens. The federal assistance was greatly needed as well as personnel of non-profit organizations. As federal employees started to arrive in Puerto Rico, detail opportunities came along for the NRCS employees. The opportunities covered Soil Conservation, Engineering, and to Resource Soil Science, the latter field becoming the detail I was fortunate to perform.

My detail as a Resources Soil Scientist was focused on gathering data in the office and doing field site visits where I got to perform soil profile descriptions for customers that requested NRCS assistance. The detail was a great experience at a personal level since I had the opportunity to work with NRCS employees from the state office in San Juan, PR such as the State Soil Scientist Manuel Matos, Soil Survey Leader Alvin Pérez (Tifton, GA), MLRA Soil Scientist Jacqueline Vega (Kealahou, HI), and other field office employees across the island. Field visits included carrying out Emergency Animal Mortality Management practice as well as Animal Mortality Facility in sites ranging from mountainous to coastal regions. Lastly, the opportunity to meet and assist customers affected by the hurricane was a significant part of the detail



given the customer's accounts and our observations of consequences left by the natural disaster. Without a doubt an unforgettable experience from a professional and personal standpoint.

From left to right; Abdiel Santana, Samuel Rios, Francisco García, Manuel Matos, Alvin Perez, Jacqueline Vega and Janella Cruz working together at one of the field sites.

Family, Community and Diversity at North Branch Farm

By Misha Vargas, Soil Conservationist, ME



Figure 1 Elwyn spying through the Brussel sprouts

Three-year-old Elwyn soars on an indoor swing pushed by his mother, while 7-year-old Ada sits on her Uncle Tyler's lap. Now Ada "flies" around the room wearing a blanket cape fashioned by Misha, Tyler's wife, who is clad in a matching cape. Then Elwyn nurses while his parents, Seth and Anna, and his uncle talk about their farm. This flurry of activity and support of family members is all part of the plan.

The plan revolves around North Branch Farm – 330 acres of fields and woods in Monroe, Maine, just a few miles from the family homestead on Stovepipe Alley where brothers Seth and Tyler Yentes grew up. With two other siblings and their parents, they produced and preserved much of their food. That's also where Tyler, at age 16, bought his first team of draft ponies, and where the brothers decided they wanted to farm together.

Their homeschooling included music along with their "classroom" work. Tyler studied violin with Janet Ciano, Clorinda Noyes and Gilda Joffe and then taught himself traditional fiddle music. Seth studied cello with Ciano, Dick Noyes, Miles Jordan of the DaPonte String Quartet – "a great instrumental teacher" – and at the University of Maine Orono with Noreen Silver. He transferred to Indiana University for one semester to study with Emilio Colón – and then, decided that he wanted to be a farmer rather than

spend so much money on a college education that was going to lead me to a city. So he moved home! Indiana, ironically, was part of his farming heritage: His mother grew up there and his great grandparents farmed there.

Their musical expertise has led to some off-farm income through Seth and Tyler's fiddle-cello duo, Whiffletree. Tyler also teaches classical violin and fiddle, and Seth, cello. Now, though, with two young children, Seth is minimizing his musical engagements.

Anna Shapley-Quinn, the daughter of two family physicians, grew up in North Carolina, where her family ate "in a counter-cultural way." She became interested in agriculture – especially after learning in a high school class about the environmental effects of conventional farming. "I thought, maybe this is something I could do for a living that would let me be outside." She wasn't sure she could make farming work, though, and her parents wanted her to go to college, "so I decided to go to Hampshire College because they have a 15-acre vegetable farm and I could study writing and anything else I wanted."

Anna visited Maine with two of her Hampshire roommates who were from Deer Isle and had grown up playing chess against, and music with, Seth and Tyler. After college Anna planned to spend one summer in Brooksville helping those friends start the bakery Tinder Hearth and then return to North Carolina to farm. But Seth and Tyler were at the first contra-dance she went to in Maine that summer ... "and here I am!" she says. She also worked at Four Season Farm between college semesters in January 2006 and again in the summer of 2008 while at Tinder Hearth.



Figure 2 Misha Vargas feeding the newborns

Tyler's wife, Misha Vargas from Puerto Rico, is been part of North Branch Farm since 2016. She works for the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) as a Soil Conservationist in Bangor, Maine where she combines her love for the farm and her love for "helping farmers help the land". Misha mostly helps with chores, busy season on the farm and pollination by growing flowers.

The North Branch farmers now grow an acre of nursery stock for sale, primarily to Fedco, as well as about 240 trees for the Waldo County Soil and Water Conservation District. The stock includes apple, pear; grape vines; lowbush blueberries; highbush cranberries; medlars and elderberries. All live in the nursery for two years, with half an acre being dug each year.

They dig nursery stock with an 80 hp, four-wheel-drive tractor with a side-mounted bed lifter (because the trees are so tall) – "a big J-shaped chunk of iron that cuts under the roots of trees and loosens the soil," Seth explains. They loosen and dig one row at a time. The same implement lifts carrots and parsnips as well, two rows at a time.

Their acre of highbush blueberries – Duke, Blue Jay, Blue Ray, Jersey, Nelson and Meader – opened for pick-your-own in 2016. (They dug out 100 Elliott plants that matured too late.)

They sold about 1,000 pounds of blueberries last summer, opening for a couple of days each week. "It's a fun way to get people here and have folks get to know our farm," says Seth, "particularly a lot of locals who drive by but don't see a lot of what's going on."

At the end of the season, they lost about 15 to 20 percent of the crop to the spotted wing drosophila, a new fruit fly pest in Maine. "Last year was really our first year of production," says Tyler. "We're at maybe 10 to 20 percent of what we'll be getting in a few years. [The pest] may make a bigger difference then."

North Branch has been a licensed dairy since 2011 and a licensed creamery since 2015. It is a seasonal operation, milking from May through November when the cows are on fresh pasture, and making artisanal hard and semi-hard, cave-aged, unpasteurized cheeses then. They have 34 cows and are milking nine in a mixed herd of grass-fed American Milking Devon crosses, Canadians and Jerseys.

The farm includes about 200 acres of forest – about 70 of those under an NRCS timber stand improvement plan, with Mallory, doing that improvement on a contract basis.



Figure 3 Cheese room #1

Caribbean Region

Recovery on the West Coast

By Misha Vargas



Figure 1 Roby's farm after María

Far on the west coast of Rincón, PR better known as "Surf Town", a young beginning farmer struggles to get back on his feet after hurricane María.

"It left me with 4 seeds of Yautía and a few plantain plants", he said. Roby, his father and one other employee have been working nonstop to recover their land. "Between two part time jobs and my farm I barely have time to breath!" – he said between laughs.

Roberto C. Aybar (Roby) native from Rincón Puerto Rico counts with roughly 2.4 acres of land where 1.7 of those are in corn, beans, ñame, cilantro and others. He just started last year with help from the community and local knowledge. "The majority of the work is done by hand although I'm leaning towards



Figure 2 Arado con Bueyes

something more advance, efficient and ecofriendly". Roby's goal is to have a sustainable farm and serve his community by having fresh locally grown vegetables.

2018 NOPHNRCSSE-NEDC Joint Leadership and Technical Training

Commemorating 25 Years of Hispanic Excellence in Natural Resource Conservation. Adelante!

When: June 5-9, 2018

Where: [DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel San Antonio Downtown](#)

502 W. Cesar E. Chaves
San Antonio, Texas, 78207
TEL: 210-224-7155

Block of Rooms under NOPHNRCSSE-NEDC

Government Rate: \$124

Reservation Deadline: **May 14, 2018**

One daily breakfast buffet voucher per room included in rate

Complimentary Wi-Fi in meeting space and guest rooms

Complimentary Parking

Program at a Glance: [NEDC Trainings June 5-7](#) (No registration fee) Register for Course in AgLearn

- Civil Rights Compliance in Program Delivery **NRCS-NEDC-000002**
- Managing for Excellence **NRCS-NEDC-000010**
- Working Effectively with Hispanic Producers **NRCS-NEDC-000262**
- Improving Conservation Delivery for Women Landowners and Producers **NRCS-NEDC-000378**

NOPHNRCSSE Trainings and Meetings June 8-9

Registration Fees:

NOPHNRCSSE Members: \$195

Nonmembers: \$225

Retirees: \$150

Saturday Banquet only: \$75

Friday, June 8th

Morning:	Opening Ceremony/Plenary Session
Mid-Morning	Concurrent Trainings Begin
Noon:	Ray T. Margo Awards Luncheon
Afternoon	Concurrent Trainings
Evening:	Scholarship/Auction Night

Saturday, June 9th

Morning and Afternoon:	Concurrent Trainings Continue
Late Afternoon:	NOPHNRCSE Business Meeting
Evening:	25 th Anniversary Banquet and Closing Ceremony

NOPHNRCSE Concurrent Trainings (Register for Course in AgLearn):

- Career Development and Networking/Outreach **NRCS-NHQ-000052**
- Special Emphasis Program Manager Training **NRCS-NHQ-000033**
- Soil Health Workshop **NRCS-NHQ-000035**



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 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: 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	Yadira.feliciano@pr.usda.gov
East	Janella Cruz	518-327-3774, ext. 3	Janella.cruz@ny.usda.gov
Midwest	Diana Avellanet	269-467-6336, ext.3	Diana.avellanet@mi.usda.gov
Northern plains	Roberto Luciano	701-463-2851, ext. 244	Roberto.Luciano@nd.usda.gov
South Central	Flavio Garza	956-723-6643, ext. 3	Flavio.Garza@tx.usda.gov
South East	Joxelle Velazquez	601-483-6336, ext.113	Joxelle.velazquez@ms.usda.gov
West	Victor Hernandez	530-792-5628, ext. 3	Victor.hernandez@ca.usda.gov

