



## MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

BIANCA DIAZ-DELIZ



Dear NOPHNRCSE Members,

As the first day of spring just passed I hope you all had a blessed holiday season along with family and friends and that what is still to come of 2019 brings with it new experiences and opportunities for all.

To begin with, I want to thank you for putting your confidence in me as your President elect.

As we welcome our new council members, I also want to extend my gratitude to those who have contributed their time to serve as part of our National Council.

I am pleased to announce our 2018-2019 council members: Staying on the council for a second term is Rocemi Morales (Executive Vice President) and Bianca Soto (Secretary). Joining NOPHNRCSE: Luis Cruz-Arroyo (Vice-President) and regional representatives: Joel Alicea-Hernandez (Midwest), Jose Rodriguez (Caribbean Area), Misha Vargas (East), and Lori Valadez (Northern Plains).

A big thank you to Janella Cruz, Diana Avellanet-Echevarria, Yadira Feliciano, Roberto Luciano, Victor M. Hernandez and Michael Margo for their leadership for the past 2 years.

Later this year we will be recruiting the following positions: Vice-President, Treasurer and Regional Representative from the South East, South Central and West. If you know of any members who might be interested, please start reaching out to them to ensure that we have a good election year.

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## CONT'D: MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

This summer (August 19-24, 2019) NOPHNCSE will partner with the Employee Development Section (EDS), the National Organization of Professional Women in NRCS (WIN), the Asian Pacific Islander Professional Employee Organization (APIO), the American Indian- Alaska Native Employees Association (AIANE) and Equality USDA to host a training conference. Stay tuned for more information as topics are selected. If you want to serve as part of the planning committee please speak to your regional representatives, Rocemi Morales, Executive Vice President or myself Bianca Diaz-Deliz.

A couple of changes on committee chairs: Onboarding we have Yomaree Cortes-Diaz (Awards), Milton Vega (Nomination/Elections), James Rodriguez (Scholarships) and Ricardo Ortiz-Rios (Newsletter Editor). Welcome aboard!

Just as important, Janella Cruz is our NOPHNCSE webpage master. Thank you Janella Cruz, Misha Vargas and Tania Nanna for all your efforts to get our NOPHNCSE webpage back and running. To our new and existing members, I'm looking forward to working together towards reaching our goals.

Sincerely,

*Bianca Diaz-Deliz*

President of NOPHNCSE

*¡Hola!*

NOPHNCSE members,

Share with us the great work done in your States. If you have an article or success story you would like to share through La Voz, please click [here](#) or send it to

[ricardo.ortiz-rios@ca.usda.gov](mailto:ricardo.ortiz-rios@ca.usda.gov).

Keep thriving,

**Ricardo Ortiz-Rios**

*La Voz Editor*

## "NOPS Y": A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITIES

One of the goals of our organization is to provide **opportunities** for employees to gain **experience, visibility and recognition**.

Available vacancies in the following committees:

- **COMMUNICATIONS**
- **CONSTITUTIONS & BYLAWS**
- **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**
- **FINANCE**
- **NATURAL RESOURCES**
- **PARTNERSHIPS (LEGISLATIVES & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS)**
- **RECRUITMENT & CAREER DEVELOPMENT**



If you want to serve on any of these committees, please contact your regional representative.

## NOT A MEMBER YET? **JOIN US TODAY!**

The purpose of the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees is to assist NRCS in the delivery of program benefits and services to the Hispanic and Latino community by strengthening NRCS efforts in recruitment, retention, development, and advancement of Hispanics and Latinos. Our members are dedicated to the stewardship of our natural resources while working with Hispanic and non-Hispanic customers in urban, suburban, and rural settings.

### **SOME OF THE GREAT BENEFITS OF JOINING ARE:**

- Professional and career development – training, workshops and information on NRCS employment opportunities.
- Leadership development – NOPHNRCSE leadership positions provide opportunities to plan and develop projects, coordinate with partners, and enhance leadership skills.
- International conservation – interact with members who have completed NRCS international assignments and also volunteer for international assignments.
- Public service – use your professional skills to assist NRCS provide services to the Hispanic community.
- Members may request funds to engage in outreach activities to promote information about NRCS programs and training within NRCS.

Learn more about: [Membership types and benefits](#); and [how to apply](#).





United States Department of Agriculture

# SAVE THE DATE

## August 23-24, 2019

## Spokane, WA

# Joint Employees Association Training

Asian Pacific Islander Organization (APIO)

American Indian Alaskan Native Employees  
Association (AIANEA)

National Organization of Professional Hispanic Natural  
Resources Conservation Service Employees  
(NOPHNRCS)

National Organization of Professional Women In Natural  
Resources Conservation Service Employees  
(WN)

Equality USDA



*Kulia i  
ka-nu'u*

# "Strive for the Summit"



USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

# NOPHNRCSE AWARDS NOMINATIONS

BY. YOMARÉE S. CORTÉS-DÍAZ, AWARDS COMMITTEE CHAIR

NOPHNRCSE members:

The time has come to start nominating those members that are doing extraordinary work, not only for NOPHNRCSE but also for Hispanics across the nation and throughout USDA-NRCS. Please speak up and nominate that member for an award. We are hoping every NOPHNRCSE member will participate more this upcoming year.

Below you will find the list of all the categories. You may find the forms on: <https://nophnrcse.org/2019-conference-news-update/>

Last day to receive nominations will be May 24, 2019.

## NOPHNRCSE AWARD CATEGORIES

### Leadership

The NOPHNRCSE Leadership Award recognizes the accomplishments of proactive and motivated men and women who are active members in the Hispanic community. The award especially recognizes their participation in and support of NOPHNRCSE in addition to their contributions in their profession and Hispanic communities. This award is given in tribute to the forerunners and pacesetters of the organization whose dedication and leadership resulted in the creation of the organization. Only one award will be presented each year.

### Visionary

The NOPHNRCSE Visionary Award recognizes the accomplishments of forward-looking and innovative men and women who are active members in the Hispanic community. The award especially recognizes their participation in and support of NOPHNRCSE in addition to their contributions to their profession and Hispanic community. This award is given in tribute to pioneers of the organization whose hard work and vision resulted in the creation of the organization. Only one award will be presented each year.

### Award of Excellence in Natural Resources Conservation

The NOPHNRCSE Award of Excellence in Natural Resources Conservation is designed to recognize individuals who, over a period of time, have contributed substantially and creatively to our natural resources conservation profession. The recipient should exemplify excellence in a particular discipline and, possibly, in multi-discipline efforts that promote excellence and creativity. The recipient also should demonstrate leadership and involvement in NOPHNRCSE. Members currently serving on the National Council or serving as a current committee chair are not eligible for Awards of Excellence. The Awards Committee will decide the number of award(s) presented each year.

## CONT'D: NOPHNCSE AWARDS NOMINATIONS

### **Award of Excellence in Hispanic Community Outreach**

The NOPHNCSE Award of Excellence in Hispanic Community Outreach is designed to recognize individuals who, over a period of time, have contributed substantially and creatively to Hispanic communities. The recipient should exemplify excellence in a particular discipline and possibly, in multi-discipline efforts that promote excellence and creativity. The recipient also should demonstrate leadership and involvement in NOPHNCSE. Members currently serving on the National Council or serving as a current committee chair are not eligible for Awards of Excellence. The Awards Committee will decide the number of award(s) presented each year.

### **Outstanding NOPHNCSE Member Award**

The NOPHNCSE Outstanding Member Award is the highest recognition given by the members, themselves, to one of its members. The purpose of this award is to recognize excellence in professionalism and leadership as a NOPHNCSE member. It is based on achievements in NOPHNCSE over an extended period of years and on participation and support of the NOPHNCSE mission. Only one award will be presented each year.

### **Amiga/Amigo Award**

The NOPHNCSE Amiga/Amigo Award recognizes the activities of an individual(s) or organization, which have substantially contributed towards the improvement of NOPHNCSE and/or Hispanic community at large, in regards to visibility, information dissemination, and program accessibility. The recipient should demonstrate an involvement with the Hispanic community, and by actions, show support of NOPHNCSE's vision and mission. Only one award will be presented each year.

**NOMINATION FORMS: [CLICK HERE](#)**



# 2018

## HISPANIC FARMER OF THE YEAR AWARDED Javier and Petra Mancha Honored

BY SERAFIN AGUIRRE, DISTRICT CONSERVATIONIST



Pictured Left to Right: Serafin M. Aguirre, NRCS Maverick County District Conservationist, Michael Margo, NOPHNRCS President, Mr. Javier Mancha, Ms. Petra Mancha and Yomaree Cortes-Diaz, NOPHNRCS Awards Committee Chairperson.

On June 5, 2018, Javier and Petra Mancha were awarded the 2018 Hispanic Farmer of the Year by the National Organization of Professional Hispanic Conservation Service Employees (NOPHNRCS). The presentation was made at the 25th NOPHNRCS Annual Conference held in San Antonio, Texas.

This very prestigious award involved intense competition among the many excellent Hispanic conservationist from across the United States.

The Mancha's received this award due to their commitment and passion to conserve the natural resources and promote conservation leadership in Maverick County. From their original 10 acres in the area of Maverick County known as the Rosita Valley, the Mancha's have grown their agricultural operation to over 500 acres.

The Mancha's started by working with the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, developing a conservation plan and implemented conservation practices such as land leveling and critical land treatment first on their land in Rosita Valley. The Mancha's agricultural operation grew when they purchased property just south of El Indio, Texas. Again, they utilizing the NRCS and began to implement conservation practices on these 500 acres. Anyone who has traveled "El Indio Highway" over the years, have witnessed the Mancha's "Cuatro Hermanas" Ranch, go from an unproductive, brush infested ranch to a well-managed, irrigated and very productive ranching and haying operation. The Mancha's "fruits of their labor" are well known in Maverick County. Many have tasted the delicious watermelons and cantaloupes that are usually on sale during the month of June. These are produced at the Mancha's Rosita Valley farm.

In the area of promoting conservation leadership, Mr. Mancha is Chairman of the Maverick County Soil and Water Conservation District #253 and he is also the Chairman of the Maverick County Water Improvement District #1 (MCWID#1). The Mancha's have been very instrumental in spreading the word in Maverick County on beneficial conservation practices in promoting and utilizing the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to help develop conservation plans on agricultural lands.



## CONT'D: HISPANIC FARMER OF THE YEAR AWARDED

The Mancha's have been very instrumental in spreading the word in Maverick County on beneficial conservation practices in promoting and utilizing the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to help develop conservation plans on agricultural lands.

In Maverick County, NRCS has made significant progress in maintaining healthy and productive working landscapes by achieving their mission of "Helping People Help the Land." NRCS offers technical and financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and other agricultural producers to plan and implement conservation practices. The number of farmers and ranchers throughout Maverick County, utilizing the NRCS, has significantly increased, due in part to the Mancha's involvement in the community and setting an example as to what can be accomplished by following an NRCS conservation plan.

Adequately applying conservation practices not only assist landowners in conserving his own natural resources but also playing an important role in the environment. Implementing conservation practices on one resource concern, such as soil erosion, can reduce sediment in our water ways and reduce flooding.

Agriculture plays a crucial role in every economy and individuals within it. Agriculture serves as the backbone of our country which is why sustaining and improving the land and our natural resources are vital to a sustainable future. "The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Maverick County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) are partners working with farmers, ranchers, communities, tribes and other individuals and groups to protect and improve natural resources on private lands," said Javier Mancha.



Mr. Mancha baling.



# FROM THE GREAT LAKES REGION TO THE CARIBBEAN AREA

BY DR. EDWIN MARTINEZ MARTINEZ

## Background

On September 6–7 and September 19–20, 2017, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) suffered catastrophic damage to their landscapes and waterways from the devastating rain and winds of Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The storms wreaked social, economic, infrastructure, power transmission, water resource (drinking & surface water), transportation, and agricultural devastation across the Caribbean Area. It is estimated that hurricane damages will surpass \$90 billion, worsening the financial crisis affecting the government of Puerto Rico. The 185-mph winds of Hurricanes Irma and Maria were the strongest ever recorded, and they are the most severe natural disasters on record to hit the USVI and Puerto Rico, respectively, causing numerous fatalities across the area.



EWP site evaluations – Debris Removal.  
Photo Provided by the Caribbean NRCS Team.

## Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program

USDA-NRCS has authority under the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) Program to provide funding to help residents by removing immediate hazards to life and property caused by floods, fires, drought, windstorms, and other natural occurrences. EWP allows NRCS to act quickly to help local communities cope with natural disasters.

Just a few weeks after hurricane Maria, USDA sent a team of 16 engineers and conservationists from across the country to lead a detailed resource assessment to identify EWPP-eligible sites in Puerto Rico and the USVI. The USDA NRCS led a detailed resource assessment that identified sites eligible for the EWP Program. Over 440 exigent project sites were identified for debris removal based on each individual municipality's priorities, for an estimated total cost of \$31 million. Over 120 sites were also identified for non-exigent work and cost estimates are being completed for these sites to address erosion control and bank stabilization practices.

The USDA NRCS Caribbean Area EWP Team partnered with land stewards, landowners, and local governments to assess and implement practices in priority areas. Some of the partners involved include the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DNER), the US Virgin Islands Department of Public Works, local municipalities, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD).

## CONT'D: FROM THE GREAT LAKES REGION TO THE CARIBBEAN AREA



USDA Team Meeting with Resident Commissioner Jennifer Gonzalez. Photo Provided by Dr. Edwin Martinez.

### Challenges

The workload and challenges for Caribbean Area residents, local governments, and our agency to successfully implement the program have been significant. Some of the challenges encountered included: completing site assessments right after the storm without power, water, or communications; limited resources and staff; completing EWP implementation during the Caribbean rainy season; and the financial crisis that Puerto Rico faces.

### The Team

The devastation was so widespread across the islands that NRCS Caribbean Area Director, Edwin Almodóvar, requested support from detailees across the U.S. to address some of these challenges. Over 60 detailees from across the country assisted with EWP logistics, Damage Survey Reports, leadership and guidance, planning, implementation, and project completion inspection work. A wide range of detailees assisted with implementing the unprecedented scope of the Caribbean Area EWP Program, including but not limited to, state conservationists, soil conservationists, natural resources specialists, soil scientists, engineers, biologists, contracting officers, grants and agreement specialists and Farm Bill program assistants.

### My Detail Experience

My detail as the Caribbean Area Emergency Watershed Protection Program Coordinator started on January 15, 2018 and ended June 15, 2018. I was also blessed to have the opportunity to provide technical support to the Caribbean Area through a previous detail in October 2017 as part of the first EWP team that completed hurricane Damage Survey Reports to secure funds. That detail offered me the opportunity to assess the damage first hand which was really hard, but rewarding.



Local Meetings with Municipalities, FEMA and Regional Conservationist Visit. Photo Provided by Edwin Martinez.



## CONT'D: FROM THE GREAT LAKES REGION TO THE CARIBBEAN AREA

As the EWP Program Coordinator, I provided leadership and technical support, working directly with the Caribbean Team and sponsors to promote EWPP and successfully execute agreements. I developed a strong partnership with other federal agencies, state and local governments, nonprofits and private organizations to address common conservation goals for emergency work under EWPP. I teamed up with the Caribbean Director, State Engineer, National EWP Program Coordinator, DNER Secretary, Grants & Agreements and Contracting Specialists to execute a federal contract to address as many projects as possible. I was also able to successfully secure agreements with local Conservation Districts, municipalities, DNER and the USVI Department of Public Works. I developed several EWP briefing papers and reports to keep partners and agency leadership up to date and informed of our activities, including a briefing with leaders from Congress.

While detailed to the Caribbean Area, I continued my duties as Natural Resource Specialist managing the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative working with the states of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin as part of an Interagency Agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA).

### Up to date EWP Team Accomplishments

In the 17 months since Hurricanes Irma and María, the Caribbean Area EWP team has made significant strides, partnering with the PR Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, PR Soil & Water Conservation Districts, and the VI Department of Public Works, resulting in:

- ☀ 314 Exigency Projects Completed – 184 completed by NRCS under 100% cost share, 130 completed by others (Municipalities, DNER, SWCDs).
- ☀ 125 Exigency Projects in Progress – under 90%-10% cost share.
- ☀ 17 completed by Force Account Agreements, 83 completed by Locally-Led Agreements, 84 completed by Federal Contract Agreements.
- ☀ 200,000 cubic yards of debris & sediment removed from waterways in 53 impacted municipalities in Puerto Rico and all three U.S. Virgin Islands.
- ☀ **5,776 People at risk saved.**
- ☀ **5,854 Properties at risk saved.**

EWP work in  
Barranquitas, Puerto  
Rico – Debris Removal.  
Photo Provided by the  
Caribbean NRCS  
Team.



EWP-2018 - PR\_BAQ\_004 - BARRANQUITAS, PR

### Thank You Note

This has been one of the most rewarding experiences in my professional career and life. I will be forever grateful for the opportunity. I would like to thank everyone who has been part of the EWP Program Hurricane Relief Efforts for the Caribbean Area. Your assistance is well appreciated at all levels. There is still a lot of work to be done, stay tuned for future EWP opportunities in Puerto Rico.



# SANTA MARIA, CA HOSTS THE 4TH ANNUAL LATINO FARMER CONFERENCE

BY CHRISTINE CHAVEZ, OUTREACH COORDINATOR, DAVIS, CA

Congressman Salud Carbajal (CA-24) opened the fourth annual Latino Farmer Conference. The congressman talked to the 200 farmers and partners in attendance, about his experience working as a farmworker in Oxnard. He also encouraged the farmers in attendance to seek guidance from USDA and other partners who had gathered to offer their support.

"Hispanic farmers and ranchers are a growing demographic in California and on the Central Coast, so I'm thrilled that this year's annual Latino Farmer Conference is being held in Santa Maria," said Carbajal. "The conference gives Latino farmers support, education, and networking opportunities that help them thrive in the agricultural industry."

Following Congressman Carbajal was a keynote address by farmers from Rancho La Familia Farm, vegetable and strawberry growers from Santa Maria. Closing out the morning session was a panel of five Latino farmers. The panelists discussed challenges and opportunities that they have experienced. The panelists also took questions from the audience.

In between the workshops and morning sessions farmers had a chance to visit with over 30 agricultural vendors who had assembled near the main ballroom. California Department of Food and Agriculture, FarmLink, E- Harvest Hub and USDA agencies (NRCS, FSA, RMA, RD and NASS) all provided materials and information to the farmers.

Six different educational workshops followed the opening remarks. The courses were held in two, 90-minute blocks. This allowed each attendee to choose two different subjects of interest throughout the day. The workshop topics

included Access to Capital and USDA Resources; Soil Health; Efficient Use of Water; Food Safety Requirements; and Regulations for Farmworker Health and Safety and Marketing.

The conference concluded with a buyer panel representing a diverse cross section of California agriculture. The buyers talked about requirements that farmers would need to sell their produce to local markets.



Congressman Carbajal meets with Future Farmers of America students from Santa Maria High School.  
Photo Provided by Christine Chavez.



The crowd at the annual Latino Farmer Conference listen to the speakers during the morning program. Photo Provided by Christine Chavez.

# USDA AND CALIFORNIA STATE PARTNERS DISCUSS AB-376

BY VICTOR M. HERNANDEZ, OUTREACH COORDINATOR, DAVIS, CA



California State partners working with USDA to extend the reach to Veterans. Diana Rude, legislative director of California Guild, speaks on behalf of partners for AB-376.

Photo Provided by Victor M. Hernandez

On July 18, USDA California leadership met at the State Capitol with legislative partners supporting Assembly Bill 376, signed into policy September of 2017.

The bill was signed into law by the Governor of California and became active July 1, 2018. For information on the bill text, follow the link below: **Bill Text - AB-376 Veterans benefits: veteran farmers or ranchers**

The bill provides for California state organizations to work with USDA to extend the reach to veterans. State partners provide

support for transitioning service members and veterans who may have interest in agriculture. Organizations like Cal Vet, Cal EDD, CDFA and others will host the USDA Veterans logo hyperlinked to <https://newfarmers.usda.gov/>, so, that if a veteran visits the California partners' site, the veteran will have the option to connect to USDA veterans resources.

In 2017 AB-376 was drafted amending the original bill 2574. The outreach team advised lead partner California Guild in support of Veteran Farmer cultural overview and USDA programs. California state organizations provide tremendous support for veterans from educational, vocational and technical resources. Yet, they face the same staffing challenges as USDA agencies, and in many respects have "no boots on the ground."

Several Veteran Farmer Outreach Day workshops were held in 2016. These were led by Carmen Johnson in Modesto, Dwane Coffey in Elk Grove, Corri Calvertin Escondido, and Dan Taverner in Chico. Additional workshops were held in 2017 and 2018 at Butte College in Oroville (led by Tarverner) and Cal Poly Pomona (led by Cindy Montepagano and Ernesto De La Riva). The workshops facilitated the collaboration of veteran, business, and educational resource partners.

The collaborative effort grew to include California Employment Development Department 'Hire a Hero, Hire a Vet,' career fairs, National Center for Appropriate Technology 'Armed to Farm' workshop, Farmer Veteran Coalition 'Home Grown by Heroes' market label, U.S. Small Business Administration 'Boots to Business' Transition Assistance Program, National Chamber of Commerce Foundation 'Transition Summits' and SCORE Mentors.

"Farmers are business owners, farmers are entrepreneurs. Veterans are among the most successful of entrepreneurs," said Michael O' Gorman, president and founder of Farmer Veteran Coalition. "We see veterans as the next generation of farmers."



Michael O' Gorman (forefront), speaks on The Farmer Veteran Opportunity Act of 2018. In the background, John Spangler, Deputy Secretary for Legislation at Cal Vet listens on.  
Photo Provided by Victor M. Hernandez

# NOPHNRCSE

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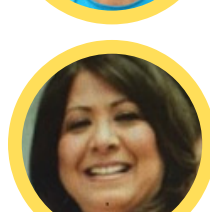
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