

The Official Newsletter of **PHNRCSE**

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF PROFESSIONAL HISPANIC NRCS EMPLOYEES

MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

VICTOR MANUEL HERNANDEZ



Welcome to your Winter edition of La Voz!

I invite you to learn about the National Organization of Professional Hispanic Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees (NOPHNRCSE) or "Nopsy", con cariño. NOPHNRCSE is comprised primarily of Hispanic professionals in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, and Administration. Being Hispanic is not a requirement to become a member... Everyone is welcome in our great family! As such, our goal as a departmentally recognized organization by USDA is to provide leadership and mentorship in support of the recruitment, retention, development, and advancement of our diverse and unique fabric that makes up our membership.

From our primera junta, el 20 de Mayo del 1992 in Albuquerque "Burque" Nuevo Mexico, to the official charter el 15 de Diciembre del 1992 by NRCS Chief, William Richards, NOPHNRCSE has held true to its motto: "Hispanics – Partners for Success". Hispanic Agricultural professionals of NRCS have worked together in streamlining technology transfer and conservation technical assistance to improve program benefits and services to the over 80,000 registered Hispanic farmers and ranchers living in rural and urban America. Including the development of new partnerships with colleges and universities to inspire the next generation of Hispanic entrepreneurs and future agricultural professionals residing in historically underserved and socially disadvantaged communities.

The legacy of our NOPHNRCSE heritage echoes in my heart from my recent conversations with Michael Margo, nephew of Ray Margo Jr., and the inspiring words of our first President, Humberto Hernandez at the <u>25th</u> <u>anniversary in San Antonio, Texas</u>, where the Hispanic Soil Conservation Service (NOPHSCSE) employees met por primera vez en Mayo del 1993. The diversity and inspiration are ever present from leaders like Rebecca De La Torre, Bertha Venegas and Astrid Martinez, who as past presidents continue to provide rich perspective and are paving the way for women Hispanic agricultural professionals beyond the glass ceiling. With these reflections and words, I congratulate our outgoing President Bianca Diaz-Deliz quien deja su huella fijamente imprenza al legado de nuestro NOPHNRCSE.

It is with gratitude and honor that Lassume the privilege bestowed upon me desde el 10 de Noviembre del 2020 to represent YOU, our NOPHNRCSE familia, as your Presidente. I look on to fortifying our foundation, for capacity building and a more united *Nopsy*.

V.M. Hernandez, M.S President

IN THIS EDITION

Message from our outgoing President P. 2



New National Council and Regional Representatives P. 3



Starr County Resident Rises to National Grazing Lands Coordinator! P. 4 - 5



Milton Cortés: Eulogy P. 6 - 7







MESSAGE FROM OUR OUTGOING PRESIDENT

BIANCA DIAZ-DELIZ



NOPHNRCSE,

Please join me in congratulating and welcoming our newest, NOPHNRCSE President, Victor M. Hernandez; the newest national council members: Misha Vargas, executive vice president; and Yomaree S. Cortes-Diaz, secretary; and our new regional representatives: Vivian Vera, Caribbean; Pedro Cruz-Caraballo, Northern Plains; Keith Marie Feliciano-Cortes, Midwest; and Milton Vega, East.

In addition I thank Bianca Soto, outgoing secretary; Rocemi Morales, outgoing executive vice president; and outgoing regional representatives: Victor Hernandez, Jose Rodriguez, Joel Alicea-Hernandez and Misha Vargas for their outstanding leadership and support during their term.

It was during my last National Council meeting, on Nov 10th that I found myself experiencing mixed feelings and recognized how grateful I am for the lessons learned throughout the years and especially in these last two years.

Looking at the council and seeing how we all have grown as professionals and individuals just reinforced what I already knew... What is still to come for NOPHNRCSE is exiting and we will continue to be here for years to come!

Two years went by too fast, and I wanted to thank everyone form NOPHNRCSE, leadership and the employee professional organizations, for saying yes and working the challenges and opportunities presented with a lets get it done attitude. I'm honestly humbled and grateful for the opportunity to work with you.

As my role in NOPHNRCSE transitions, I would like to encourage you to be involved on some of the committees and planning events to come and let NOPHNRCSE expose you to experiences outside your comfort zone challenging you to become the best version of yourself.

Attentively,

Bianca Diaz-Deliz NOPHNRCSE

Outgoing President

NOPHNRCSE: A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITIES

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

Be part of our working committees:

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

Contact your regional representative if you would like to serve in any of these committees.



Dear NOPHNRCSE members,

We present you the 2020 Winter Edition of *La Voz* that we hope you enjoy and share with members and non members alike. This is an opportunity to showcase the efforts and successes of NOPHNRCSE membership. Please, continue sending 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 send it to

ricardo.ortiz-rios@usda.gov.

Thriving together,

Ricardo Ortiz-Ríos La Voz Editor

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR NEW NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBERS AND REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES!



Top Pictures from Left to Right: Victor Manuel Hernandez, Misha Vargas, and Yomarée S. Cortés-Díaz. Bottom Pictures from Left to Right: Pedro Cruz, Keith Feliciano, Vivian Vera, and Milton Vega.

Swearing of the elected council was held on November 10, 2020. See the Swearing Ceremony.

PRESIDENT Victor Manuel Hernandez

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Misha Vargas

SECRETARY Yomarée S. Cortés-Díaz

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE NORTHEN PLANES *Pedro Cruz*

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE MIDWEST Keith Marie Feliciano-Cortes

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE CARIBBEAN Vivian Vera

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE EAST Milton Vega

STARR COUNTY RESIDENT RISES TO NATIONAL GRAZING LANDS COORDINATOR

BY MELISSA BLAIR, PUBLIC AFFAIRS SPECIALIST, CORPUS CHRISTI, TX

Temple, Texas, July 14, 2020 – Starr County resident, Michael Margo, is the new the National Grazing Lands Coordinator in Fort Worth. He will be responsible for leading national partnerships with groups such as the National Grazing Lands Coalition, Society of Range Management and the National Cattleman's Beef Association.

NatGLC is a nationwide consortium of individuals and organizations working together on mostly private land to maintain and improve the management and the health of the Nation's grazing lands. The NatGLC works with state coalitions such as Texas Grazing Lands Coalition (TXGLC) to help accomplish its mission by organizing rancher workshops, demonstrations, and trainings throughout the year. NRCS and TXGLC have trained grazing land specialists that can work voluntarily one-onone with landowners and land managers at no charge.



Michael Margo. Provided by Melissa Blair

Conservation Legacy

Margo was raised in a conservation-minded ranching family in Rio Grande City and had the opportunity to see a successful partnership with the family ranch and conservation benefits throughout his life.

The Margo family has worked with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) now the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) since 1947, when his grandfather, Raymundo T. Margo, was the first chairman of the Starr County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). His grandfather was also the first SWCD member who had a conservation plan on the family's south Texas ranch.

"My father, Dr. Roberto S. Margo, has continued the working relationship with NRCS since the late '60s while serving as ranch manager," said Margo. "My uncle, Ray T. Margo Jr., retired from SCS/NRCS in 1993 as New Mexico's State Conservationist after 37 years of service working in both Texas and New Mexico."

"I have personally seen the results of successful conservation practices that have been implemented with the assistance of NRCS at the family ranch over many years," said Margo. "My upbringing has inspired me to continue the legacy of conserving our natural resources not only at the family ranch but on private lands across the nation."

Legacy Shapes Career

After three years of undergraduate studies at Texas A&M University in College Station, Margo returned to south Texas to join AmeriCorps for two years, promoting environmental awareness issues at the Texas AgriLife Extension Office in Rio Grande City. His experience with AmeriCorps and working with ranchers, NRCS and extension rangeland specialists inspired him to change his major to Rangeland Ecology and Management. He returned to A&M and earned a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Science in Rangeland Ecology and Management.

CONT'D: STARR COUNTY RESIDENT RISES TO NATIONAL GRAZING LANDS COORDINATOR

Margo started his federal career with the Department of Interior in Estes Park, Colorado from 2004 to 2006. His next move was to Marfa, Texas as a rangeland management specialist from 2006 to 2014 then onto Tolland, Connecticut as NRCS Soil Survey Region 12 ecological data qualify specialist where he worked on development of ecological sites. He was hired in May 2020 as the national grazing lands coordinator and moved to Fort Worth.

"Developing effective grazing plans requires knowledge of land resources, their potential, and dynamics and NRCS provides this valuable information for ranchers or land managers through a product called ecological site descriptions," said Margo. "Ecological sites are the basic component of a land classification system that identifies areas of land with unique soil and vegetation characteristics. By providing a description of the site's physical and biological characteristics (soil, climate, landform, plant community dynamics, plant production, and management interpretations), a rancher or land manager can assess the condition of current resources, evaluate management opportunities, and predict the outcome of their management decisions."



Michael Margo on a range inventory in Alaska. Provided by Melissa Blair

Margo served in several details and acting roles with NRCS including: assisting the national rangeland management specialist in development of an ecological site description handbook and ecological site training; served as a subject matter expert for the NEDC course Rangeland Ecology I and II; served in details assisting the National Grazing Land Team in Ft., Worth, and serving as President of the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (NOPHNRCSE). Margo has been a member of the Society of Range Management since 1999.

"I would like to acknowledge my parents, Dr. Roberto S. Margo and Minerva H. Margo for instilling the importance of education, responsibility, and integrity and my wife, Suzanne Margo our son, John Michael and my daughter who is arriving end of this month."

Future Conservation Efforts

As the new national coordinator, Margo would like to continue the success of the organization, but also cultivate new national and state partner organizations who support the vision and mission of NatGLC.

"Local grazing coalitions are the key to disseminating pertinent grazing land information and assistance," said Margo. "I would like to eventually see all states have local coalitions. My experience with AmeriCorps has instilled in me their motto of Getting Things Done while working as a team member and that's what I intend to do in the realm of grazing lands stewardship."

Milton Cortés: Eulogy



Mr. Milton Cortés began his professional career as an Extension Agent with the Puerto Rico Agricultural Extension Service in Toa Alta, Puerto Rico (1981-1990). In 1990 he took his first federal assignment with the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Skippack, Pennsylvania to update the South Eastern Soil Survey until 1993. In 1993 he transferred to Mayagüez, Puerto Rico as a Resource Soil Scientists/Soil Survey Project Leader until 1997. During that time, he was entrusted with the leadership to update the Lajas Valley Soil Survey and serve as the liaison for the Climate Project in the U.S. Virgin Islands, being responsible for project leadership, data stewardship, operational support, software management and equipment liaison. Due to his exceptional efforts, in 1997 he received a recognition for his outstanding support to the "St. John Island Global Climate Changes Project". That same year (1997). Milton transferred to North Carolina (NC) as the Assistant State Soil Scientist where he served as the main soil data steward for the "Web Soil Survey" and was responsible for the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) for North Carolina. In 2000 Mr. Cortés was detailed to Honduras for two years to provide soils and

agronomy support as part of the agency's emergency aid and recovery efforts after hurricane Mitch for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). After completing this international assignment, he was recognized in January of 2002 for his outstanding contributions to the success of the "USDA Hurricane Mitch/Georges Reconstructions Project in Central America and the Caribbean". During his tenure, he also served as "acting" State Soil Scientist in Florida, North Carolina and Wyoming. In 2018, Mr. Cortés reached the pinnacle of his professional career, by becoming the State Soil Scientist and first Hispanic employee to serve in this capacity in North Carolina. Mr. Cortés fulfilled the leadership role of North Carolina State Soil Scientist until his passing on November 29, 2020.

Beyond Milton's expertise in soils and outstanding knowledge and abilities in the use of technology in this field, he was always prepared and willing to help others, especially new employees. His desire to offer guidance and mentorship to many young Hispanic employees left an everlasting impact on a generation of professionals, who continue to lead by his guiding principles, work ethic, and professionalism. The influence Mr. Cortés maintained, fostering and guiding employees during the onboarding process and leading them towards a successful career path, goes far beyond helping Hispanics. It is almost impossible to mentioned all the NRCS employees he has mentored through the years, but to give you an idea of Milton's impact to Hispanics and NRCS leadership, here are a few NRCS leaders Mr. Cortés has mentored: Luis Hernandez MO Leader- MA, Astrid Martinez STC-WY, Juan C Hernandez STC-FL, Rafael Vega NC-SRC and Manuel Matos SSS-PR, among many others. By giving so much, Milton has forever shaped the future of the NRCS. His support and direction impacted people of all cultural backgrounds, without bias, cultivating the unique potential and self-esteem of his colleagues so that they could discover their own place in the agency and forge a better path for the incoming generation. He was a pioneer in establishing an environment of kindness, respect and comradery that celebrates cultural diversity and unity within the workplace and society. Milton was a National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (NOPHNRCSE) founding member and served on numerous committees including the Awards Committee and Farmer of the Year Committee. Mr. Cortés served on the North Carolina Civil Rights Advisory Committee and passionately advocated and led the cultural transformation of a diverse workforce as the North Carolina Hispanic Special Emphasis Program Manager. Milton's self-spirited dedication and noble efforts in employee development and Hispanic outreach made him a deserving recipient of many national awards, including the NOPHNRCSE "Amigo Award" (2015) and "Visionary Award" (2018). Because of his influence, affection, and selfless contributions to a generation of NRCS employees, he earned the unconditional respect of his peers and was affectionately known as "Don Milton, The Godfather" among his mentees and proteges.

CONT'D: Milton Cortés: Eulogy

Among the many accomplishments throughout his 40 years of public service, Mr. Cortés participated in the translation (English / Spanish) of the publication "Soil Survey of San Germán Area of Puerto Rico", and assisted in the translation of two editions of the NRCS worldwide-used soil taxonomy. He was also instrumental in the translation of the document "From the Surface Down (Desde la Superficie Hacia Abajo)", a keystone agency-wide publication. Milton was an active member of the Soil Science Society of America, Southern Regional Cooperative Soil Survey Conference, North Carolina Nutrient Management Working Group, North Carolina Department of Revenue-North Carolina Use-Value Advisory Board, and Charter Member of NOPHNRCSE.

Milton is survived by his wife and partner Lourdes Cortés Jiménez, the love of his life. Milton's legacy will continue to prosper in our hearts and through our actions as friends and family continue to mourn his loss.

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."

- 2 Timothy 4:7

From the NOPHNRCSE Family.



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.



NOPHNRCSE

NATIONAL COUNCIL

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE



PRESIDENT Victor M. Hernandez, Davis CA victor.hernandezeusda.gov 530-792-5628

CARIBBEAN AREA REPRESENTATIVE Vivian Vera, Caguas, PR vivian.vera@usda.gov 787-743-2203 ext. 109



EAST REGION REPRESENTATIVE Milton Vega, Tolland, CT milton.vegaeusda.gov 860-871-4018





VICE-PRESIDENT

Flavio Garza, Laredo, TX flavio.garza@usda.gov 956-723-3222 ext. 3







EXECUTIVE VICE-PRESIDENT Misha Vargas, Bangor, ME misha.vargas@usda.gov 207-573-5420

NORTHERN PLAINS REGION REPRESENTATIVE Pedro Cruz. Dighton, KS pedro.cruzcarballo@usda.aov 620-397-5751 ext. 108





TREASURER urayoan-diaz.pachecoeusda.gov 575-546-9692

SOUTHEAST REGION REPRESENTATIVE

Josean Torres, Lumberton, NC josean.torreseusda.gov 910-739-3349, ext.3





Urayoan Diaz-Pacheco, Deming NM

SOUTH CENTRAL REGION REPRESENTATIVE

Stella Santos, Uvalde TX stella.santos@tx.usda.gov 830-278-2014, ext. 101



SECRETARY Yomarée S. Cortes Diaz, Asheboro, NC yomaree.cortesdiazeusda.gov 336-629-4449 ext. 1650

WEST REGION REPRESENTATIVE VACANT



Follow us



Click <u>here</u> to see the Regions Map.