

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 NC. 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's almost impossible to mentioned all the NRCS employees he has mentor 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. 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 (NCCRAC) and passionately advocated and led the cultural transformation of a diverse workforce as the NC Hispanic Special Emphasis Program Manager (HEPM). 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 "Visionary Award" (2018) and "Amigo Award" (2015). 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 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.

