



Esteemed NOPHNRCSE Virtual Conference participants:

For over 31 years, NOPHNRCSE has helped shape the future of Hispanic employees, students and producers in their efforts of ensuring the conservation of our valued natural resources through NRCS' program benefits. Today, in our 3rd annual NOPHNRCSE Virtual Training Conference, we welcome all of you to be a part of that mission whether you are here to learn or to share your knowledge. Because this year's theme "Unidos in Progress, Building a Tomorrow" means it will take all of us, UNIDOS, to build that tomorrow we all want so our descendants can enjoy our valued natural resources for generations to come.

Thanks to all the participants for your interest, our partners for your support, the agency for your encouragement, our members for your commitment and our presenters for your willingness to share your wisdom. And a very special thanks to our national council and committee members for your time, your leadership, your passion and your patience. None of this could be possible without you.

This is only the beginning of what this great group wants to accomplish as we work diligently in growing, cultivating, retaining and improving. We are increasing our membership and partnerships. We are increasing our digital presence with our new website and social media so we appeal to our new generation of conservationists. We are expanding our offerings to our members, unidos to improve every day.

On behalf of the NOPHNRCSE National Council,

Feliz mes de la Hispanidad y
Feliz Conferencia Virtual 2024!

Carlos Roda,
NOPHNRCSE President



DAY 1: Thursday, September 26th, 2024

Start time: 12:00 pm EST End time: 3:30 pm EST

Moderator: Julieta LeCollazo

TIME	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTER
12:00PM (EST)	Welcome & Opening Remarks	Carlos Roda Civil Engineer, FL NOPHNCSE President
12:05PM (EST)	Guest Speaker-RCs Office Update	Curtis Elke Regional Conservationist, DC
12:15PM (EST)	Session 1-Technical Track: Planning and Design of Production Wells	Manuel Diaz-Gonzalez Civil Engineer, MA
1:00PM (EST)	BREAK	Employee Highlights/Wellness Tools
1:15PM (EST)	Session 2-Professional and Leadership Development Track: Technical Service Providers	David Walden Technical Service Providers Branch
2:00PM (EST)	BREAK	Employee Highlights/Wellness Tools
2:15PM (EST)	Session 3-Outreach and Community Service Track	Travis Watkins FPAC's National Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager
3:00PM (EST)	Kahoot Knowledge Check	Edrick Marrero State Agronomist, PR
3:15PM (EST)	Closeout	Carlos Roda



DAY 1: *Moderator: Julieta LeCollazo*



Julieta is an Area Program Specialist in Washington State. She has been working with NRCS for a little over five years, starting with the Iowa Park, Texas team. NRCS has always been her dream job, and she is very happy to be part of the NRCS family. Julieta is passionate about helping others and learning new things. She completed both her masters and bachelors degree in Soil Science at Texas A&M University.

Outside of work life, Julieta is married with two beautiful children. Her favorite hobby is spending time with her family and growing/living in her faith.

Carlos Roda

NOPHNRCSE President



Originally from Ponce, Puerto Rico, Carlos completed his degree in Civil Engineering from the University of PR, Mayaguez campus. After 2 summer internships, he started his career as a field engineer and then area engineer in Bowling Green, KY. After 13 years in the bluegrass state, he moved to Florida where he currently works in the state office engineering staff in Gainesville. He lives there with his wife and two daughters. In his spare time, he enjoys traveling, wood working and working out.

Carlos has worked in several Emergency Watershed Protection details in Kentucky, Florida, and Puerto Rico after natural disasters such as floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes. He has also served in a detail as Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in the State of Wyoming while completing the 2020 multi-state leadership development program. He recently completed a 4-month detail in the Headquarters as National EWP Program Manager. As a collateral duty, he served as Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager and then Civil Rights Committee Chair for 9 years. He is currently the President of the National Organization for Professional Hispanic Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees.

Guest Speaker: Curtis Elke

Curtis Elke has served as the NRCS regional conservationist for the Central Region since February 2024. He provides support to state conservationists and natural resources leadership, ensuring effective management of conservation strategies, which include implementing NRCS's conservation technical and financial assistance programs on private lands.

Elke began his NRCS career as a field soil conservation technician in North Dakota and progressed to a soil conservation planner and district conservationist in Oklahoma for several years. He also served as assistant state conservationist in both Massachusetts and South Dakota for a combined 10 years.

Prior to becoming the NRCS Central regional conservationist, his leadership as the Idaho state conservationist supported USDA partners and customers through technical and financial assistance programs and public awareness of effective conservation measures.

He graduated from North Dakota State University where he majored in soil science, horticulture, and landscape design. Elke has two children who both work for NRCS.

Session 1- Planning and Design of Production Wells

Manuel Diaz Gonzalez



Manuel Diaz is an agricultural engineer with the USDA-NRCS in Amherst, Massachusetts. He has worked for the agency for 15 years mostly involved in projects related to irrigation and soil and water management in the states of Washington, Utah, Idaho, New Hampshire, Puerto Rico and Massachusetts.

Synopsis:

The webinar will include description and examples of production wells intended to withdraw from water table, confined and bedrock conditions. The presentation will cover several topics:

- a) Planning: description of the data gathering process and identification of a suitable well system.
- b) Design: high fly overview of the designing process for a well system.
- c) Installation: description of installation process and well development.

By the end of this webinar, participants will be able to identify basic components related to the planning, designing, and installation of a well system.

Session 2- Technical Service Providers

David Walden



David grew up on a small family farm in Soperton, Georgia, where his family raised hogs and cows, and cultivated corn, soybeans, and tobacco. He feels fortunate to be the fourth generation to live and work on their farm, where he also currently manages a commercial cow herd.

In 1991, while studying at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton, Georgia, David began his career as a Student Trainee. After transferring to and graduating from the University of Georgia in 1993, he took on a full-time role as a Soil Conservationist. Throughout his career, David has held various positions, including Soil Conservationist, District Conservationist, Area Resource Conservationist, and Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations.

Davis has been happily married to his wife, Leigh Ann, for 27 years, and together they have been blessed with two wonderful daughters.

Session 3- Outreach and Community Service*Travis Watkins*

Travis Watkins is FPAC's National Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager. He is a part of FPAC's Civil Rights and Equal Employment Opportunity Division, under Office of the Under Secretary for Farm Production & Conservation. Travis has been with USDA for 19 years, native of the DC area, and a proud graduate of the Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, FL. Upon graduating with his Bachelors in Agribusiness, he began his career with NRCS as a Natural Resources Specialist in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, where he resides to this day.

Travis is largely known for his work on the (ACES) pilot and subsequently managed the national program for over 10 years, under NRCS' Talent Management Division. Since arriving to CREEOD, Travis has become certified EEO Counselor through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and has received his Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility certification from Cornell University. Travis is also FPAC's National Black Emphasis Program Manager, and has served as the Acting Team Lead for Affirmative Employment Programs.

Kahoot Knowledge Check!

Dr. Edrick Marrero Soto



Edrick is natural from Moca, Puerto Rico. In 2005, he obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Agricultural Sciences with a specialty in Horticulture from the UPR Mayaguez Campus and a Master in Science Degree in 2008. In 2009, he received a Masters in Planning and Rural Development at the Polytechnic University of Madrid. In 2024, he obtained his Doctoral Degree in Education from The Interamerican University of PR, specializing in farmer adoption of sustainable agriculture practices.

In 2013, he was appointed Executive Director of the College of Agronomists of PR. In May 2014, he worked as professor of the Extension Service at the UPR in Mayaguez. He has worked in several initiatives to address needs of farmers. Since May 2020, he joined USDA-NRCS Caribbean Area as State Agronomist providing service to Puerto Rico and USVI.

On his spare time, he likes to share time with his son Kostas and his daughter Isabella, his wife Lilly and their dogs Lola and Vali. He likes to work at the farm, go to the beach, see movies, travel around the island, and working in his coffee and citrus farm in Guilarte.

Day 2-Thursday, October 3rd, 2024

Start time: 12:00 pm EST

End time: 3:30 pm EST

Moderator: Lilliam Torres

TIME	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTER
12:00PM (EST)	Welcome & Opening Remarks	Paula Salazar, Management & Program Analyst, UT NOPHNRCSE Vice-President
12:05	Guest Speaker	Terry Cosby Chief USDA -NRCS, Washington DC
12:15PM (EST)	Session 1-Technical Track: CD and Environmental Evaluations	Matt Flint National Planning Technology Lead, NHQ's Conservation Planning Branch
1:00PM (EST)	BREAK	Employee Highlights/Wellness Tools
1:15PM (EST)	Session 2-Professional Leadership Development Track: Leadership Team Member Breakout Sessions	Paula Salazar NOPHNRCSE Vice-President
2:00PM (EST)	BREAK	Employee Highlights/Wellness Tools
2:15PM (EST)	Session 3: Outreach and Community Service Track	Willisa Donald Civil Rights Director
3:00PM (EST)	Kahoot Knowledge Check	Juan Cruz-Civil Engineer, FL Julieta LeCollazo-Area Program Specialist, WA
3:15PM (EST)	Closeout	Paula Salazar Management & Program Analyst, UT NOPHNRCSE Vice-President



Day 2:

Moderator: Lilliam Torres



Lilliam Torres was born and raised in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico. She is passionate about life, family, music, animals, coffee and nature. She obtained a degree in Agricultural Sciences and graduated as an Horticultural Agronomist. She also received a Master's Degree in Environmental Health from the Faculty of Medical Sciences of the University of PR. Lilliam has been committed to the public service for the past 28 years; working for both Puerto Rico and United States Department of Agriculture. In October 2016, she started her career with NRCS in Caguas, PR.

In May 2020, she began working as Soil Conservationist in Connecticut, acting as District Conservationist for the Torrington office in 2023, while also participating in the New England Leadership Development Program. Her most recent promotion started in March 11, 2024 at the Amherst State Office (MA) as a Resources Conservationist / SWAPA Team Coordinator, with her team supporting all field offices with contracting, planning, cultural resources, HEL determinations, and a variety of special projects.

Guest Speaker: NRCS Chief Terry Cosby

NRCS Chief Terry Cosby leads a premier federal conservation agency known for its 3,000 field-office network that helps farmers, ranchers and private forest landowners nationwide plan and carry out voluntary conservation activities on their operations. During Terry's more than 40-year career with NRCS, he has held numerous leadership and staff positions. He began his career as an NRCS intern in Iowa in 1979 and rose through the agency's ranks to become its 17th chief on May 24, 2021. Terry grew up on his family's cotton farm and attended a land grant university that prepared him well to serve all producers, including those who were historically underserved.

Prior to being named Acting Chief, Terry served as NRCS State Conservationist in Ohio for 16 years. His other leadership positions include Deputy State Conservationist in Idaho, Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in Missouri, and Area Resource Conservationist in Iowa. Terry's great-grandfather purchased the family farm in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, in the late 1800s.

Terry, a Tallahatchie County native, earned his Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Education from Alcorn State University in Alcorn, Mississippi, the nation's first Black land grant college. Terry and his wife Brenda are the proud parents of four children. His leisure activities include hunting, fishing, and spending as much time as possible with his seven grandchildren.

Session 1- CD and Environmental Evaluations*Matt Flint*

Matt Flint is the National Planning Technology Lead in NHQ's Conservation Planning Branch and the NRCS team leader for the CD-EE project. A former NRCS National Technology Support Center employee, state resource conservationist, and state biologist with a federal career spanning 32-years, there is more to Matt's career than IT development work. His interests outside work include beekeeping, small-scale vegetable gardening, wildlife photography, and kayaking.

Synopsis:

Conservation Desktop-Environmental Evaluation (CD-EE) will become available for use in October 2024. This technology's release marks the beginning of transition to a new alternative for the NRCS-CPA-52. Gain early insight into CD-EE's new look and suitability for EQIP, CSP and CRP. The presentation will cover its advantages, limitations, opportunities for state-specific guidance, and the timelines for training and roll-out.

Session 2- Leadership Team Member Breakout Sessions*Paula Salazar*

Paula Salazar is the Management & Program Analyst for business operations with NRCS Utah State Office in Salt Lake City, Utah. She was born in Caracas, Venezuela and raised in Miami, FL. Paula started her career in 2015 as a Pathway Student Intern in Ohio and after graduating in Environmental Studies, with an Agroecology Minor from Florida International University, she started as Soil Conservationist full time. For 9 years she has worked in 3 different states with different positions, but after completing UT-NV-AZ Tri-State Leadership Development Program, she decided to join the Management & Strategy Team. During her spare time, she is a gardener in summer, snowboarder in winter, loves flowers and adventures with her partner and two dogs.

Synopsis:

Want to be part of a Leadership Team (LT)? Now is your time to ask one of them! There will be an LT member from each development track, including Assistant State Conservationist for Partnerships (Luis Aponte), Management & Strategy (Ricardo Colon), Programs (Diana Avellanet-Echevarria, Acting), Field Operations (Walter Albarran), State Resource Conservationist (Bianca Diaz), State Engineer (Ernesto De La Riva) and State Soil Scientist (Isabelle Giuliani). During these breakout sessions, you will be able to ask about their career development, lessons learned, and how they obtained their LT position.

Session 3: Outreach and Community Service

Willisa M. Donald



Willisa M. Donald currently serves as the Director of the Civil Rights and Equal Employment Opportunity Division of USDA Farm Production and Conservation (FPAC) since July 2023.

Ms. Donald has over 30 years of experience as an expert administering Civil Rights, EEO and Diversity programs. She began her federal career in 1991 at the Department of Transportation as a Junior Fellow GS-2, Equal Opportunity trainee and later served as a Special Emphasis Program Manager, Affirmative Employment Program Manager and as a Disability Program Manager. Ms. Donald earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology. She also has a Master's degree in Human Relations from the University of Oklahoma.

Synopsis:

During this session participants will be provided with an overview of FY25 Civil Treatment training course by the Civil Rights and Equal Employment Opportunity Division. You will be briefly introduced to the Prescriptive Rules, a guide for Leaders to follow: 1) Guard Words and Actions 2) Document 3) Get Help 4) Be Constructive and Professional 5) Welcome Concerns. Along with key Leadership actions that mobilize cultural change: 1) Model the Values, 2) Communicate and Integrate, 3) Hold accountable, 4) Build an open culture, 5) Follow up and reinforce.

Kahoot Knowledge Check!

Juan Cruz



Juan is a Civil Engineer in the Florida State Office since 2023. He joined the Natural Resources Conservation Service in 2021 and NOPHNRCSE in 2022. Juan is currently serving as Chair for our Natural Resources Committee.

Beside Juan's roles with NRCS in FL, he has over 7 years of experience in the private sector working with dams and treatment facilities, and more than 3 years with the Bureau of Reclamation working with larger dams and irrigation canals and serving as the Regional Value Program Coordinator in CA.

Day 3-Thursday, October 10th, 2024

Start time: 12:00 pm EST End time: 3:30 pm EST

Moderator: Victor Hernandez

TIME	DESCRIPTION	PRESENTER
12:00PM (EST)	Welcome & Opening Remarks	Damuel Morales, Natural Resources Specialist, KY NOPHNRCSE Executive Vice President
12:15PM (EST)	Session 1-Technical Track: Small Scale Urban Ag	Rafael Gonzalez Pagan Urban Conservationist, WI
1:00PM (EST)	BREAK	Employee Highlights/Wellness Tools
1:15PM (EST)	Session 2-Professional Leadership Development Track: Awards	Lourdes Bobadilla-Soil Conservationist, UT Juan Cruz-Civil Engineer, FL
2:00PM (EST)	BREAK	Employee Highlights/Wellness Tools
2:15PM (EST)	Session 3: Outreach and Community Service Track: Hispanic American Cultural Effort ERG	Luciana Paz-APHIS's PPD Environmental and Risk Analysis Services (ERAS)
3:00PM (EST)	Kahoot Knowledge Check	Lilliam Torres-Resource Conservationist, MA Angel Domenech-Area Resource Soil Scientist, MI
3:15PM (EST)	Closeout	Damuel Morales Natural Resources Specialist, KY NOPHNRCSE Executive Vice President



Day 3:*Moderator: Victor Hernandez*

Victor M. Hernandez, U.S. Marine Corps veteran, joined the USDA family in 2006 as a Student Career Experience Program intern, and Farm Loan Officer with the Farm Service Agency. In 2015, Hernandez joined NRCS as Outreach Coordinator and Sociologist where he developed several custom-tailored outreach initiatives: The 'Growing Together' Latino Farmer Conference (a Spanish language program for Spanish learners), The 'Growing Together' Black Farmer Conference with Urban farmers, and The Beginning Farmer and Rancher Series (a monthly live-streamed program) among other initiatives, engaging Asian, Women, and Veteran farmer communities.

In 2023, Hernandez was awarded the FSA Administrators Fence Leaner Award for his out-of-the-box leadership as Beginning Farmer Rancher Coordinator - California. Among other leadership roles, Hernandez served as President of the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees from 2020 to 2024.

As of April 8, 2024, Hernandez joins FPAC Civil Rights Equal Employment Opportunity Division as Language Proficiency Coordinator, Equal Opportunity Specialist.

Damuel Morales-Barreto

NOPHNRCSE Executive Vice-President



Damuel H. Morales-Barreto was born and raised in Moca, Puerto Rico. He completed his bachelors degree at the University of PR Mayaguez campus, where he learned the beauty of agriculture and conservation. During his free time Damuel enjoys learning, hiking, cleaning, and spending time with his family and friends.

Damuel started his career with NRCS in 2018 as a Soil Conservationist Student Trainee Pathways in the state of Kentucky. As a pathway, he had the opportunity to work for several offices in KY, and the Ecological Sciences Division for the Caribbean Area. Damuel is currently a Soil Conservationist at the Winchester KY Service Center, transitioning to become a Natural Resources Specialist working as a Water Resources Planning Specialist for the state of Kentucky.

Additional to his regular duties, Damuel has served as an advisor for the NRCS Hiring Strategy Task Force and participated on a detail by helping during recovery efforts after Hurricane Fiona in Puerto Rico. He is also the Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager in the Civil Rights Committee for the state of Kentucky and serves as Executive Vice-President for NOPHNRCSE.

Session 1: Small Scale Urban Ag

Rafael Gonzalez Pagan



Rafael is an Urban Conservationist for the Southeast area of Wisconsin. He started his career with NRCS in 2018 as a Soil Conservationist in Jackson County, Minnesota. In 2020 he moved to Council Bluffs in Iowa, where he learned about Urban conservation and small-scale farming. In 2023 Rafael accepted the position of Urban Conservationist in Juneau, WI, working with underserved urban farmers in Milwaukee and Madison. Rafael graduated from the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez where he obtained a bachelor's degree in general agriculture and horticulture. Rafael enjoys riding his bike, hiking, traveling and cooking.

Synopsis:

This presentation will cover information about program eligibility and availability for small-scale and urban farmers.

Topics to discuss:

- Eligibility process for small scale and urban farmers.
- Challenges in eligibility, capital access, language barriers and options to overcome them.
- Conservation practices and variety of programs, practices for small-scale and urban farmers.

Session 2- Awards

Lourdes Bobadilla Ortega



Lourdes Bobadilla was born and raised in Mexico City. She later immigrated to Tucson, Arizona where she obtained a bachelors from the University of Arizona in Wildlife Conservation and Management (Go Wildcats!). Lourdes is currently pursuing her Masters in Wildlife Forensic Science from the University of Florida.

At her home, she is the proud owner of three adorable dogs: a Chihuahua, a Dachshund, and a Plott Hound. Her love for nature extends to plants, as she has curated a collection of over 70 plants in her home and around 30 in her office. During her leisure time, she enjoys working out, traveling with her partner and find solace in the act of cleaning .

Session 3- Outreach and Community Service

Luciana Paz



Luciana Paz serves as the Chair of the USDA Hispanic American Cultural Effort (HACE) employee resource group and is an advocate for diversity and inclusion within the agency. She also holds the role of Hispanic Special Emphasis Program Manager within Policy and Program Development (PPD) program at the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

In her primary position as a Writer/Editor within APHIS's PPD Environmental and Risk Analysis Services (ERAS), Luciana supports the development of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents, assessing the impact of the agency's actions on the human environment. Luciana's commitment to service extends beyond her current role. Prior to joining APHIS, she served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Mozambique, where she coordinated HIV and Malaria awareness projects and taught English and Computer Literacy.

A graduate of the University of Tampa with degrees in Political Science, Journalism, and Education, Luciana is Bolivian American and has lived in various parts of Latin America and Africa. In her free time, she enjoys training for triathlons and writing creative nonfiction.

Kahoot Knowledge Check!

Angel Domenech



Angel was born and raised in Carolina, Puerto Rico. He completed a bachelor's degree in Agronomy and masters in Soil Microbiology at the University of PR, Mayaguez Campus. Angel began his career with NRCS in 2011 as an MLRA Soil Scientist in Arkansas. He participated in two summer details performing Initial Mapping in Wyoming. In 2014, he moved to Kentucky as an MLRA Soil Scientist.

Angel participated in two EWPP details in Puerto Rico and one in Michigan. In 2020, he moved to Michigan as an Area Resources Soil Scientist. Angel has been a lifetime NOPHNRCSE member since 2011. He was chair of the NOPHNRCSE scholarship committee and part of the National Council since 2021 as the organization's Treasurer. In October 2024, Angel will begin a new position as Program Analyst in San Juan, PR. He is married and has two daughters.

Thank you for joining us and see you next year in our 2025 NRCS ERG Training Conference in Sacramento, California!

NOPHNCRCSE NATIONAL COUNCIL

Position	Name	Email
President	Carlos Roda	carlos.roda@usda.gov
Vice President	Paula Salazar	paula.salazar@usda.gov
Executive Vice President	Damuel Morales	damuel.morales@usda.gov
Secretary	Lilliam Torres	lilliam.torres@usda.gov
Treasurer	Angel Domenech	angel.domenech@usda.gov

REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

Representatives for the National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees REGIONS

- West:** Lourdes Bobadilla
- Midwest:** Rafael Gonzalez
- Northeast:** Manuel Diaz
- Northern Plains:** Gustavo Diaz
- Southcentral:** Sonia Burgos
- Southeast:** Diana Avellanet
- Caribbean:** Edrick Marrero

Organizational Region Legend:

- EAST (Green)
- MIDWEST (Yellow)
- NORTHERN PLAINS (Orange)
- SOUTH CENTRAL (Pink)
- SOUTHEAST (Blue)
- WEST (Purple)
- CARIBBEAN AREA (Light Blue)

STANDING COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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Communications (Internal & External Affairs)	Ana Santos	ana.santos@usda.gov
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Natural Resources	Juan Cruz	juan.cruzechevarria@usda.gov
Outreach & Partnerships	Victor Hernandez	victor.hernandez@usda.gov
Membership	Angel Domenech	angel.domenech@usda.gov