



# La Voz

Newsletter of the National Organization of Professional Hispanic  
Natural Resources Conservation Service Employees

August 2004

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## President's Message

*By Bertha Venegas  
NOPHNRCSE President*

I am excited to be leading an organization committed to motivating and mentoring members for leadership roles to assist NRCS and partners in delivering natural resources conservation.

During our National Training Conference in Sacramento, California, Chief Bruce Knight challenged us to make the civil rights statement a reality by providing service to all segments of society.

I am committed to working with the Council and our membership to address issues that affect Hispanics. These issues comprise of training Hispanics for leadership roles, program delivery, and recruitment of Hispanics to our agency.

I encourage everyone to take the opportunity to become a member of one of our committees. Traditionally we have had approximately 21 committees. This year, we have condensed it to 10 committees with some being

grouped within other committees. This will allow us to maximize the potential for success and minimize duplication. We will provide a list of committees and committee chairs in the next newsletter.

Congratulations to those members who received awards during our conference for their hard work and commitment to our organization and the NRCS. I want to congratulate the students who received scholarships and thank those who made donations to the scholarship fund.

Thanks to all who made the 2004 National NOPHNRCSE Conference in Sacramento a success! We succeeded as an organization in providing excellent training to our members. "Bringing Diversity to the Nation's Conservation Needs" was echoed throughout the conference by all presenters.

Meet the National  
Council, 2004-2005

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Scholarships  
and Member  
Honors  
Awarded at  
2004 Training  
Conference

## 2004 Scholarships

The Scholarship and Endowment Fund Committee awarded two scholarships this year. The Martha Guerra-Arteaga scholarship was awarded to Jennifer Garcia, a student majoring in agriculture communications at California State University, Fresno.



*Jennifer Garcia*

Luis Rodriguez was the other scholarship recipient, and he is a student at Texas A&M University majoring in agricultural sciences.



*Luis Rodriguez*

Adolfo Diaz, one of NOPHNCSE's first scholarship recipients, is now an NRCS employee and an active member of NOPHNCSE serving as a member of the scholarship committee. Diaz is a cartographer at the Wisconsin state office.

## Awards Recognize Members for Outstanding Work, Efforts

Rick Tafoya was the recipient of the 2004 Leadership Award. This award recognizes the accomplishments of proactive and motivated men and women who are active members in the Hispanic community. Tafoya has had a 13-year career with NRCS.

His involvement with many organizations and his dedication to his work has earned Tafoya this award.

Humberto Hernandez was named the 2004 Outstanding Member. The purpose of this award is to recognize excellence in professionalism and leadership as a NOPHNCSE member. Hernandez established a USDA roundtable discussion with senior leadership at USDA. He convinced the deputy secretary to plan and implement a roundtable to look at Hispanic under representation at USDA at all levels of the organization. Without the efforts of Hernandez, this issue would not receive the level of attention it is getting today.

Xavier Montoya received the 2004 Award of Excellence in Natural Resources Conservation. It is designed to recognize individuals who, over a period of time, have contributed sub-

stantially and creatively to our natural resources conservation profession.

In a short amount of time, Montoya went from student trainee to deputy state conservationist and has recruited many Hispanics into the NRCS family. He has multi-discipline experience from serving in many different positions and now serves as deputy state conservationist in Illinois.

Mary Sanchez is the 2004 recipient of the Hispanic Community Outreach award. This award recognizes individuals who, over a period of time, have contributed substantially and creatively to Hispanic communities. Sanchez has dedicated personal time and energy in order to promote NRCS programs and technical information among the Hispanic Community.

Amanda Hasemeier was named the 2004 Amiga/Amigo award winner in recognition of her activities that have substantially contributed toward the improvement of the organization and the Hispanic community.

Hasemeier maintains consistent leadership, ensuring the continuous success of the scholarship and endowment fund. She has been chair of the committee for three years and a member since the committee was formed.



## 11<sup>th</sup> Annual NOPHNCSE Training Conference Brings Diversity to the Nation's Conservation Needs

by Reina O'Beck  
Public Affairs Specialist-  
California

Chief Bruce Knight raised five challenges to employees at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual NOPHNCSE Conference.

He challenged 180 Hispanic employees to make our civil rights statement a reality by encouraging limited resource farmers to apply for cost-share programs, informing partners about NRCS awards programs that recognize partners for their workforce diversity efforts, ensuring that old and new Farm Bill programs are provided to all eligible applicants,

promoting work with minority technical service providers, and continuing to support workforce diversity.

"Our organization, working together with NRCS and other partners, will strive towards overcoming the challenges we face today. Reaching our limited resource farmers and TSPs, working with partners and supporting workforce diversity will be a priority for us," said Bertha Venegas, NOPHNCSE president.

Held in Sacramento, California, the conference fulfilled its theme of "Bringing Diversity to the Nation's Conservation

Needs," by providing a variety of tools necessary for employees to incorporate diversity into NRCS' conservation mission.

Filmmaker Sandra Robbie and diversity consultant, Byron Kunisawa, added an external perspective on diversity and social change. Robbie introduced participants to an important civil rights case titled, *Mendez vs. Westminster*, a model for social change. Kunisawa addressed institutional discrimination, suggesting that organizations identify systematic problems perpetuating discrimination and exclusion.

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### Chief Delivers Address at National Conference

## The Pros of Lifetime Membership

By Tony A. Garcia, Jr.

The following are some advantages to life membership in any organization.

1. Life membership dues are not subject to increases.
2. Life memberships can decrease administrative expenditures (i.e. a decrease in dues collection headaches, decreased renewal notices and processing overhead.)
3. Life memberships increase revenues (i.e. increases net revenues, etc.)
4. Life memberships provide a known number of base members.
5. A life membership provides peace-of-mind in that dues are current and saves money for the member (i.e. decreases gap between date of dues expiration and date of renewal).
6. A life membership provides opportunity to promote the organization, increase stature, and for grassroots educational and outreach programs.
7. A life membership provides a "springboard" for a separate entity within the organization to manage and administer these financial gains (i.e. an endowment and investment opportunities as well as permit the organization to purchase a membership for each person enrolled as a life member. The cost would be determined by a dollar figure expected to produce enough revenue from an annual membership for investment).
8. A life membership offers a great degree of prestige and identifies you as an individual apart from the regular membership.
9. A life membership could generate income if it "raffled-off" occasionally as part of our regular membership drive or during "scholarship night".



## NOPHNRCSE Members Win USDA Honor Awards

NOPHNRCSE members receive distinguished USDA Honor Awards

Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman recognized USDA employees for stellar achievements and contributions toward fulfilling USDA's mission at the 58th annual USDA Honor Awards Ceremony in Washington, D.C., on June 25.

"It is through the tireless commitment of USDA employees that we make a difference in people's lives on a daily basis," said Veneman. "The award winners honored today are exemplary in their fields. We applaud their efforts and innovative work."

The Honor Awards are the most prestigious awards given by USDA. There were 102 award winners this year.

The honorees represent outstanding service in many fields, such as stewardship of natural resources, rural economic development, scientific research, food safety, environmental innovations, emergency response to disasters, farm and food program delivery, educational outreach, trade and export development and disease control.

USDA also honored employees who had performed individual acts of heroism and courage.

NOPHNRCSE is proud to have several members as Honor Award recipients.

Category: Protecting and Enhancing the Nation's Natural Resource Base and Environment

Winner: Southeast Region American Indian Initiative Workgroup

**Group Member: Jose Acevedo**

For innovation and creativity in expanding the partnership with American Indians, which has resulted in enhanced communications and improved delivery of conservation assistance on tribal lands in the southeast region

Category: Protecting and Enhancing the Nation's Natural Resource Base and Environment

Winner: Sustainable Coffee Production Team

**Group Members: Jose Acevedo, Juan Martinez, Pedro Martinez, and Edwin Mas**

For providing leadership for the rebirth of Puerto Rico's coffee industry, influencing long-term change that is resulting in an economically and environmentally sustainable production system.

Category: Supporting the President's Management Agenda and Civil Rights

Winner: Streamlining and Cost Savings Initiative Team

**Group Leader: Humberto Hernandez**

**Group Member: Rafael Guerrero and Patricia Leavenworth**

For developing recommendations that significantly improved Natural Resources Conservation Service's efficiency and effectiveness through streamlining operations, processes, and activities.

Category: Heroism and Emergency Response

Winner: Afghanistan and Iraq Agriculture Reconstruction Team

**Group Member: Manual Ayala, Jr.**

For outstanding support to the United States Department of Agriculture initiatives in reconstructing the agricultural sectors of Afghanistan and Iraq, resulting in the noticeable rehabilitation of the agriculture and related environmental areas of both nations.



## 75<sup>th</sup> Diamond Jubilee Anniversary for the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

By Rafael Guerrero

LULAC celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in San Antonio, Texas, during the week of July 5, 2004. Guest speakers



From left to right: Gilbert Guerrero, Rafael Guerrero, Bertha Venegas, Michael Castillo, and Zaragoza Rodriguez attend the LULAC Conference, July 6-6, 2004, San Antonio Texas.

included President George W. Bush (via video), Presidential candidate John Kerry, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, and other distinguished speakers representing the private sector and academic institutions.

LULAC announced the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Vernon Parker, assistant secretary

for civil rights, participated in the signing ceremony.

Harry Salinas, USDA HEPM, held a pre-conference training session that provided excellent civil rights training and recruitment strategies.

Lt. Gen. Sanchez told LULAC that the Hispanic culture is a recipe for success, and he urged

LULAC to continue efforts to ensure that Hispanics are prepared to lead and be in the forefront of society in the coming decades.

"The future is indeed bright for Hispanics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," said Lt. Gen. Sanchez, a native of Rio Grande City, Texas, who led U.S. troops in Iraq until July 1.

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### LULAC signs MOU with USDA

## Volunteer Learns While Working at NCGC

My name is Liza Rodriguez, and I am currently volunteering at the National Cartography and Geospatial Center (NCGC) in Fort Worth, Texas. My supervisor is Steven Nechero, Chief of the Geospatial Data Branch. I plan to obtain hands-on experience using GIS and related subjects as they apply to geography, geology, and agriculture. My duties as a volunteer for NCGC include reviewing training materials about digital cartography, developing conservation plan maps, learning about Global Positioning System (GPS) and how it

pertains to mobile computing in the field, and taking ESRI courses on the virtual campus to improve my GIS skills. I am also assisting in the development of digital layers for a general soil map of Nigeria that was scanned from analog sources.

Currently I am a senior at the University of North Texas working on a bachelor's degree in geography, a double minor in geology and Spanish, and GIS certification. My father, Ricardo R. Rodriguez, works for NRCS as a design engineer at the

state office in Temple, Texas. I sincerely appreciate and thank Rafael Guerrero and Javier Ruiz for helping and encouraging me to become part of the NRCS family and Tommie Parham, Director of NCGC, for allowing me to receive on-the-job training from his staff. I have been introduced to many nice people here at the Fort Worth Center that have helped me get acquainted with NRCS. I hope that my volunteer experience will eventually lead me to become a second generation NRCS employee.



## Why Should We Conserve Water, Energy?

By Arturo Carvajal, M.Sc. in Irrigation

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Because it's our environment too!

For most of us in the West and Southwest, we know firsthand that water demand for agricultural, urban, and environmental use is increasing fast.

During our NOPHNRCSE conference we learned that states on the East Coast (New Jersey) and the Southeast (Florida) also work hard to conserve water in agriculture and water for landscaping.

Our producers have made great progress in installing water conservation practices including micro-irrigation and drip. NRCS has provided great assistance to producers through EQIP and technical assistance in irrigation water management (IWM).

In addition, our partners, the Resource Conservation Districts, are sponsoring programs like the Mobile Irrigation Management Laboratories (mobile labs).

Here in California, we have nine mobile labs throughout the state providing irrigation system evaluations at the growers' request. After they take measurements of pressures and flows in the field, they make some

computations and offer the producers some practical recommendations on how to improve the distribution of water in their fields and increase irrigation efficiency.

During our annual training conference Gregorio Cruz, Florida, explained to us how successful a similar program (MIL) is.

The MILs evaluate agricultural and landscape irrigation systems. Many of the team members are bilingual to better communicate the evaluation results to Spanish speaking contractors.

Who benefits of this type of work? The producers receive direct economic benefits by reducing the cost of water use and energy use and potential reduction in the use of fertilizers. The water quality in the Everglades is another beneficiary of this type of water conservation program.

NRCS in Arizona also has a similar program.

Kristin Graham-Chavez provided some with very interesting results on the IWM

assistance to their producers. Arizona and other western states, including Colorado, Nevada, and California, have seen a reduction in their water supplies from the Colorado River. The Colorado River watershed has experienced a drought for four consecutive years.

What about conserving water and energy at home?

Since we work for a natural resources agency, we should do everything we can to conserve our precious water and teach our kids to do the same.

Some times, it may work the other way around and we should listen to our kids and grandkids when they come from school and want to share with us what they learned about how to conserve water and energy at home.

This year, the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual National Hispanic Sustainable Energy and Environmental Conference took place in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The NHEC strive to fulfill a very compelling credo for us Hispanics: "because it's our environment too."



## Committee Chairs for 2004-2005

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Donna Remides, Co-Chair  
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Nominations  
Mike Gonzalez  
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### Meet Your Regional Reps and Committee Chairs

## Committee Changes:

- Finance committee will include Audit, Budget, Ways and Means
- Partnerships Committee will include Legislative and International Affairs
- Communications Committee will include webmaster
- Constitution and Bylaws Committee will include Historical Profile
- Recruitment and Career Development Committee will include Women's Issues, Students, Historically Hispanic Colleges and Universities