

September - October 2013 NRCS Caribbean Newsletter

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Director's Corner

As we leave FY 2013 behind us and look forward to FY 2014, I want to pause and realize how fortunate we are in doing what we do to help protect the natural resources in the Caribbean Area. Moreover, I can't help feeling proud of achieving this goal standing next to you - You guys are awesome! I am proud of your hard work and dedication

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NRCS Pitches in to Clean Up our Coasts

On Saturday, September 21st, NRCS Mayagüez Field Office and Soil Science Division employees, along with Earth Team volunteers, joined the **International Coastal Cleanup Day**, collecting and classifying 335 pounds of garbage from the Mayagüez coastline. The cleanup was a joint effort between NRCS and DRNA. DRNA Mayagüez Regional Director, Efraín García, and personnel provided gloves and bags, and disposed of all the garbage collected. Kudos to our NRCS and DRNA staff and Earth Team volunteers for all their hard work!

to this wonderful organization.

Stay tuned as we will soon be publishing our FY 2013 Annual Accomplishments in which you are the stars. Our partners and customers will be able to read about the wonderful successes achieved together during FY 2013.

Keep on putting conservation on the ground!

Edwin Almodóvar,
NRCS Caribbean
Area Director



Photos clockwise from left to right: Activity Coordinator, Soil Conservation Technician Yadira Feliciano, delivers instructions to the group. She co-lead the event with DRNA; José Zamora (Esperanza's husband and volunteer) taking care of large trash items; MLRA leader, Manuel Matos (Soil Science Division), and Yadira Feliciano in action; Soil Conservationist Esperanza Avilés in action; All ready to start cleaning with gloves and bags (left to right): José Zamora, Esperanza Avilés, Keila Ortiz (Pathway intern), Manuel Matos, Yara Ortiz (volunteer and Yadira's daughter), Yadira Feliciano, Efraín García, Manuel (DRNA employee), Selinés Prosper (volunteer), Enid Santiago (volunteer) and District Conservationist Zulma García; (left to right): Zulma Garcia, Enid Santiago, José Zamora, Selinés Prosper, Rosario Zamora (volunteer and Esperanza's daughter), Yara Ortiz, Manuel Matos, Keila Ortiz and Yadira Feliciano; Activity closure (left to right): Manuel and Jesús (DRNA), Zulma García, Efraín García, Keila Ortiz, Yara Ortiz (with NRCS sign), Yadira Feliciano, Rosario Zamora and Esperanza Avilés.

Michelle Catoni Promoted to Soil Conservationist in San Sebastián



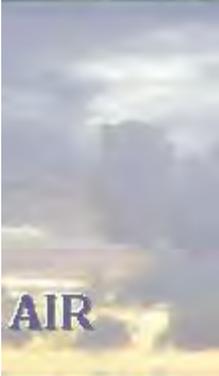
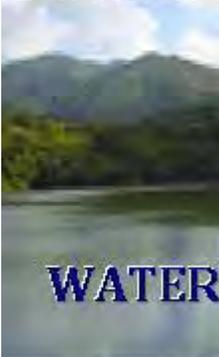
The NRCS San Sebastián Field Office welcomes staff member, Michelle Catoni, to her new position as Soil Conservationist. "It is with great pleasure that I share with all of you the selection of Michelle Catoni for the Soil Conservationist position in San Sebastián. She starts on her new role on November 3rd," said NRCS Caribbean Area Director, Edwin Almodóvar.

Michelle was born in Arecibo, PR. She has a Bachelor's degree in Agronomy from the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez and an MBA in Human Resources from the Metropolitan University of Aguadilla. Michelle has a solid agriculture background – working a couple years on a farm and as an administrative assistant for the

Pedro Torrado company, which sells irrigation systems and agricultural machinery.

Michelle joined the USDA family in October, 2007, when she began working with FSA as Program Assistant at the Arecibo field office. In September of 2010 Michelle joined NRCS as a Soil Conservation Technician in the San Sebastián Field Office. Please join us in welcoming Michelle to her new role as Soil Conservationist in the San Sebastián Field Office!

Combating Citrus Greening in Puerto Rico



The presence of “**Citrus Greening**” in Puerto Rico was confirmed in September, 2009, by AES Associate Professor, José L. Zamora Echevarría. This disease is also known as degradation of citrus, dragon yellow, and mottled chlorosis of the leaves, but its official name is **Haunglongbing (HLB)**, having been identified in Asia.

Huanglongbing (HLB) is transmitted by an insect – *Diaphorina citri* – that causes direct damage by feeding to citrus trees such as orange, lemon, and grapefruit. The disease is fatal. It destroys the production, appearance and economic value of citrus trees. Diseased trees produce bitter, hard, misshapen fruit and die within a few years of being infected. HLB is considered to be one of the most serious plant diseases in the world; currently there is no cure.

Detection of HLB can be difficult, as symptoms may not show up for more than a year after the tree has become infected. The first symptoms are yellowed leaves. However, citrus trees often have yellow leaves because of nutritional deficiencies. HLB leaf symptoms are somewhat unique in that the yellow mottling caused by HLB is not the same on both sides of the leaf. Later symptoms of HLB-infected trees include lopsided, small fruit, and premature and excessive fruit drop. Additionally, the disease can cause entire shoots or branches of the tree to become yellow.

To combat this disease, NRCS staff members Jaime Valentín, SRC, RC José L. Rivera, SC Jorge Ruiz and SCT Linnette Rosado, participated in two workshops held by the Agricultural Extension Service in Isabela, PR. At the September 19th and 26th workshops, Agro. José L. Zamora Echevarría presented his **Intensive Plan for the Management of Citrus Greening** to the Camuy Farmers Association. The Plan includes:



1. Monitoring Program of the insect and disease;
2. Plan of operations against the insect vector;
3. Nutritional program foliar sprayings;
4. Good control of weeds, pests, and diseases;
5. Phytophthora Control



Upcoming Activities

* **November 12-16, 2013: US Coral Reef Task Force to meet at Buccaneer Hotel in St. Croix, USVI;**

* **December 12, 2013: Caribbean Landscape Conservation Cooperative 2013 Annual Meeting to develop a Strategic Conservation Plan - Hotel Verdanza in Isla Verde, PR;**

The second workshop included presentations from Agro. Félix Román, Assistant Professor from the Agricultural Experiment Station, and Agro. Ada N. Alvarado, Pesticides Specialist from the Agricultural Extension Service, about their experiments to control Citrus Greening.

They have developed a simple method for visual and quantitative detection of starch in citrus leaves based on the starch-iodine reaction to assist in selecting leaves for HLB testing; this method has a 90 % correlation with Polymerase chain reaction, PCR analysis. Agro. Román and Agro. Zamora demonstrated how to identify Citrus Greening with iodine. First, leaf samples were taken of both the petiole and root bark and cut crosswise with a surgical blade. The cuttings were then immersed for 2 minutes in an iodine solution at room temperature. The tissue samples were washed in distilled water and immediately observed with a magnifier. Workshop participants had the opportunity to observe and inquire about this pest ID method to clarify their questions and misconceptions. For more information, please contact Jaime Valentín, SRC, at jaime.valentin@pr.usda.gov

Save the Date for December CLCC Meeting!

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| <p style="text-align: center;">2013 ANNUAL MEETING TO DEVELOP THE CLCC'S STRATEGIC CONSERVATION FRAMEWORK</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Identifying priorities and setting a course for cooperative conservation of our lands and seas</i></p>  | <p>SAVE THE DATE</p> <p>When: Thursday December 12, 2013 9:00am - 4:30pm</p> <p>Where: Hotel Verdanza Isla Verde, PR</p> |
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Save the date for the **Caribbean Landscape Conservation Cooperative's (CLCC) 2013 Annual Meeting** to develop a Strategic Conservation Framework. We'll be identifying shared priorities and setting a course for cooperative conservation of our lands and seas. The meeting will be held Thursday, December 12, 2013, from 9:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. at the Hotel Verdanza in Isla Verde, Puerto Rico. Online participation will be available for our USVI colleagues.

NRCS Helps the Hungry through Feds Feed Families Campaign



(Left to right): Luis A. García, USDA-NRCS; Virgen Villafañe, Supervisor Rescue Operations (Banco de Alimentos); Nilda González, USDA-NRCS, FFF Coordinator; Nancy Feliciano, Assistant for Agencies and Donors Services (Banco de Alimentos), when delivering collected food to El Banco de Alimentos.

On behalf of Edwin Almodóvar, State Conservationist, it is a great pleasure to announce that NRCS in the Caribbean Area collected 924 pounds of food during the 2013 Feds Feed Families Campaign! We accomplished 92% of our goal to collect 1,000 pounds of food. During last year's campaign, we donated 751 pounds of food to the Food Bank; this year we greatly increased our donation!

We want to extend our appreciation to the District Conservationists for their leadership and to our Field Office staff – especially Linnette Rosado and Evelyn Rivera – for their extra effort taking time in the collection process. We also want to thank José Castro, Fernando Arroyo and Luis García for picking up the food at the designated offices and bringing it to the State Office to be delivered to the Food Bank. The combination of efforts contributed to the success of this food drive.

Across the country, NRCS folks contributed 224,819 pounds of food to local food kitchens, food banks, and other food distribution centers. USDA contributed more than **4.3 MILLION** pounds of food – exceeding last year's total by **1,557,400** pounds! Many thanks to all employees for your voluntary contributions to help feed our hungry neighbors and make a difference in the life of those in need. For more information, please contact Nilda González at Nilda.gonzalez@pr.usda.gov.

Utualdo EQIP Success Story



From left to right: Israel Vega, Utualdo FO-District Conservationist; Nidia Trejo, Envirosurvey Inc.-Biologist; Rubén Ramos, Farmer; Jennifer Valentín, USFWS-Student Trainee; Xiomara Labiosa, USFWS-Student Trainee; Artemio Otero, Envirosurvey Inc.-Biologist; Evelyn Rivera, Utualdo FO-Soil Conservation Technician.

On May 16, 2013, the NRCS Utualdo Field Office (FO) partnered with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and Envirosurvey Inc., to deliver the 2nd batch of native trees to local coffee farmers to convert their sun coffee plantations to shade coffee. NRCS refers to this practice as **multi-story cropping (Practice #379)**. The event was held at a USFWS nursery located in the ward Tetuán II in Utualdo, in continuation of an interagency agreement to improve crop yield, soil

erosion, soil condition and wildlife habitat on local coffee farms. The collaboration between NRCS, USFWS and Envirosurvey Inc. demonstrates the benefits of partnerships to provide on-the-ground conservation. Through this effort, project partners are providing native tree species (Moca, Guaba, Guamá and Capá Prieto) to coffee plantation owners to guarantee that the correct amount and type of species are planted for this type of agricultural operation. During the tree delivery, personnel from all three agencies worked together to provide the necessary technical assistance, information and materials to help the farmers properly implement the practice. For more information, contact Utuado DC, Israel Vega, at Israel.vega@pr.usda.gov.

Utuado Coffee Outreach



NRCS staff from Utuado FO and the State Office provided outreach about the NRCS Conservation Technical Assistance Program, conservation practices, educational programs and career opportunities to more than 35 attendees

during the first educational activity for coffee farmers: "**Manejo Orgánico de Malezas en Cafetales**," held Friday, April 19, 2013. The workshop was sponsored by the UPR-Utuado under the CORMO Coffee Project. Dra. Mariangie Ramos Rodríguez from the UPR in Utuado delivered a presentation discussing the use of natural alternatives to control weed infestation on coffee farms using "maní forajero" (*Arachis pintoï*) and "mantilla" (*N.C. Vinca minor*), to reduce adverse effects on plant growth, production and environmental resources. NRCS displayed, discussed and provided information related to the benefits of conservation practices to our natural resources especially on coffee farms. The activity concluded with an afternoon field trip to the University coffee plantation project site. For more information, contact Utuado DC, Israel Vega, at Israel.vega@pr.usda.gov.

VI Agriculture Department Hosts 1st Value-Added Market Day



By Carol Buchanan, reprinted by permission from the St. Croix Source <http://stcroixsource.com/content/news/local-news/2013/07/27/nothing-wasted-value-added-market-day>

Nothing went to waste Saturday, July 27th, at the V.I. Department of Agriculture's first **Value Added Market Day** at the St. Croix fairgrounds.

More than a dozen vendors filled their tables with beautiful golden honey mead and fruit wines, bright orange and yellow hot pepper sauces and jellies, natural body products and everything under the sun that can be made from mango. Fresh produce wasn't available, only bottled and packaged items were for sale.

Ray Hamilton, of Feel Great Wellness Center, said the value is added when the local farmer is not letting anything go to waste, making money from the byproducts of the local produce. "*We have so much local fruit and vegetables and a lot can go to waste,*" Hamilton said. "*They can turn around and make and sell other products. They make use of everything. It's very beneficial for everyone.*" He was selling coconut oil.

Vendors were giving out samples using tiny little spoons and shot-glass size plastic cups. They also gave out contact information so people can get in touch with them when they want to purchase a product.

Wanda Wright and her daughter, Dara Hamilton (see photo at left), from The W-Right Apiary, set people up with samples of honey mustard dressing, fruit, crackers and mead. Wright produces and sells bottles of mead, wine and honey made from every fruit tree she grows in her orchard in Southgate. I B Jammin had a very yummy mango, pineapple, coconut, and rum jam.

Violet Drew, of Ras Sunrise & Daughter Stand Farm, said she sold out of her plantain chips right away. She also had mango and plantain fruit leather. She didn't waste a thing in her melon peel pickles, and her candied lime peels looked tempting.

Of course Veronica Gordon, local farmer, bush lady, artisan and storyteller was there, selling such goods as mango chutney, packaged bush tea and her hot pepper jelly that clears the sinuses.

Toni Downs had handmade Queen Caribee soaps and honey for sale. And Errol Chichester, deputy commissioner of agriculture, was selling his honey in combs and bottled. V.I. Pure wildflower honey was also available.

Miamor Young and Bambu McIntosh, of Sunlight Food, were giving samples of their vegan eggnog made with the creamy and sweet egg fruit. The fruit can be a bit strong but the eggnog was a perfect mix of egg fruit, coconut milk, vanilla, nutmeg, brown cane sugar and spices.

Laurie Samuel, of G.L.G. Plants and Produce, sold mango cake, mango nut bread and pickled mango. *"Value added is using all of the fruit,"* Samuel said. *"We don't waste anything."*

Sonia Liburd, of LT MA Enterprises, had turmeric seasoning, lately being touted as a great health food item, honey and bagged local tea.

Retired local tour operator Sweeny Toussaint is producing pickled mango chow, chutney and kuchilla and pickled mango. *"I can't just sit around,"* Toussaint said with a big smile. *"Life is for the living, I had to do something and we have a lot of mangoes."*

Yoki Hanley had a lovely display and samples of her itiba all-natural bath and body items made with local products.

Yvette Browne, owner of Sejah Farm, said she thought the market was well attended. She just wished the Agriculture Department would hold the market more often.

Janine Schuster, who was out shopping, said the market was a wonderful way to showcase local products and a step to possibly begin exporting. *"These are local products created with a lot of love,"* Schuster said.

Kimme R. Bryce, Area Specialist for USDA Rural Development, was at the market giving out information packets on grants available to the farmers and producers. A representative from the Economic Development Authority was also providing information. For details on the USDA-RD Value-Added grant program, contact your local USDA-RD office or visit www.rurdev.usda.gov/PR_Home.html.

USDA Funds Project to Support Small, Socially-Disadvantaged Farmers in PR

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary, Tom Vilsack, announced grants to support small, socially disadvantaged agriculture producers across the U.S. In the Caribbean Area, ***Cooperativa De Ganaderos De Carne De Res*** received a \$123,800 grant to develop a marketing plan, provide legal assistance, and animal health and humane treatment training.

These grant awards are part of the USDA's efforts to strengthen the rural economy. *"These grants will help socially-disadvantaged business owners get the tools they need to succeed and expand markets across the nation,"* said Secretary Vilsack. *"This funding is an example of the Obama Administration's dedication to the economic stability of rural communities throughout the country."* Funding is provided through USDA's Small Socially Disadvantaged Producer Grant program, which offers technical assistance to help producers develop new markets and grow their operations. For details on the program, please visit http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_SSDPG.html.

PR Department of Agriculture Awarded USDA Specialty Crop Block Grants

USDA awarded \$52 million in grants this summer to support America's specialty crop producers through the 2013 Specialty Crop Block Grant (SCBG) Program. Block grants were awarded to 54 U.S. states and territories, including Puerto Rico. The grants will assist producers of fresh fruits and vegetables and help strengthen markets for specialty crops such as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture, and nursery crops, including floriculture.

"These investments will strengthen rural American communities by supporting local and regional markets and improving access to fresh, high quality fruits and vegetables for millions of Americans," said Secretary Vilsack. *"These grants also help growers make food safety enhancements, solve research needs, and make better informed decisions to increase profitability and sustainability."*

Eight grants totaling \$352,290 were awarded to the PR Department of Agriculture to:

- Increase specialty crop sales by improving food safety through training and mentoring programs for specialty crop producers;
- Increase local specialty crop sales by implementing a large-scale promotional campaign including television, radio and print advertisements supporting specialty crops under the Delpais brand. Matching funds will be used to cover the cost of the inclusion of non-specialty crops;
- Increase international sales of Puerto Rico's coffee by supporting at least two coffee producers' participation in ***Specialty Coffee Association of Europe*** trade shows and export promotion activities;
- Increase production of local leafy green vegetables in schools and increase consumption of local leafy greens by school children by providing food safety training to producers and nutrition education in schools;
- Partner with ***Apiarios Caraballo*** to increase honey production and increase vegetable producers' yields by providing beehives and beekeeping training to potential beekeepers and existing vegetable growers;

- Partner with ***Nuestra Escuela, Inc.*** to develop a new generation of farmers by educating at-risk youth from Vieques in fruit and vegetable farming techniques through a formalized hands-on training program;
- Partner with ***Plenitud Iniciativas Eco-educativas, Inc.*** to increase yield, productivity and sales of leafy greens such as kale and moringa by designing, building, and demonstrating a bioponics system and training growers how to use it; and
- Partner with ***Nutricaribe, Inc.*** to develop a cacao industry by recruiting farmers to plant and farm 10,000 cacao trees.

The Specialty Crop Block Grants are administered by the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. AMS encourages states to develop projects that enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops, sustain the livelihood of American farmers, and strengthen local economies. Visit www.ams.usda.gov/scbgp for more information.

USDA-RD Supports Small & Emerging Rural Businesses in PR

The USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant (RBEG) program announced funding for projects in 30 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to support small and emerging rural businesses. Rural Business-Cooperative Service Administrator, Lillian Salerno, made the announcement on behalf of Secretary Vilsack, “*The Obama Administration has been working to create economic opportunities in rural communities and bring well-paying jobs to the people who live there,*” Salerno said. “*Strategic investments in rural businesses like the ones we are highlighting today not only help to deliver more products and services to local customers, they also contribute to rural revitalization and economic development in the small towns where these businesses are located.*”

The following projects were awarded in the Caribbean Area:

- ***Añasco Municipality*** received \$52,000 to complete construction of a building to sell coffee and locally-produced vegetables; and
- ***Coamo Municipality*** received \$100,000 to establish a revolving loan fund program.

The RBEG program promotes development of small and emerging businesses in rural areas. RBEGs may also be used to help fund distance learning networks and employment-related adult education programs. Eligible applicants for the program include public bodies, nonprofit corporations and federally recognized Indian Tribes. For details, please visit www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_rbeg.html.

Going Green by Reducing Food Waste

by Dr. Elise Golan, Director for Sustainable Development, Office of the Chief Economist, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

At this very moment, an underappreciated tool for combating climate change may be hiding in your chiller drawer or at the back of your pantry. By keeping that limp carrot or dusty box of pasta out of our nation’s landfills, you can help reduce emissions of methane, a greenhouse gas 21 times more potent than carbon dioxide.



In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) calculates that food is the single largest component of municipal solid waste going to landfills (accounting for over 20% by weight) and that that landfills are the third largest source of methane (16% of national total). By

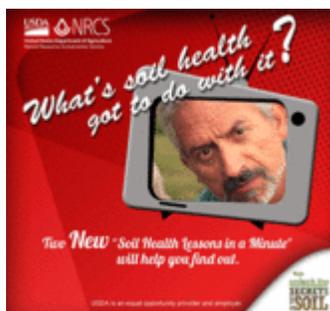
reducing the amount of food we toss into the trash, we can help reduce these potent greenhouse gas emissions.

The benefits do not stop there, however:

- When we reduce food waste by donating excess wholesome food to soup kitchens and food banks, we help to put food on the table for people in need.
- When we reduce food waste by recycling food waste to animal feed, composting, or energy generation, we free up resources for other uses and help improve the nation's soil and carbon stock.

To help spur the reduction, recovery and recycling of food waste in the United States, USDA and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency launched the U.S. Food Waste Challenge on June 4th. By working together, we can reduce the amount of food that is sent to our landfills and help combat climate change. Learn more about the U.S. Food Waste Challenge at www.usda.gov/oce/foodwaste.

Soils 101 Videos: A Great NRCS Educational Resource



By now, you've likely seen Ray Archuleta's slake test and infiltration test as part of our "**Soil Health Lessons in a Minute**" video demonstrations. But do you know what healthy soil should look and smell like? Do you know why it's important that farmers "discover the cover?"

If you haven't seen all of our informative and entertaining YouTube videos, [click here](#), and discover what soil health's got to do with it! (Oh, and watch for more video lessons, soon!) For more information on Soil Health, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/soils/health.

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