

**PR STATE TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
SEPTEMBER 11, 2013, 9:30 A.M.
COLEGIO LA MONTAÑA
UTUADO, PR**

MINUTES

Attendees:

*Edwin Almodóvar, NRCS
José A. Castro, NRCS
Fernando Arroyo, NRCS
Jaime Valentín, NRCS
Marisol Morales, NRCS
Ismael Matos, NRCS
Ana M. Román, FWS
Nilda González, NRCS
Magaly Figueroa, FS
Juan Rodríguez, FCPR
Iván Llerandi, FWS
Ramón Rivera Lebrón, DNER*

*Isela Ortiz Toro, SCD Suroeste
Denise Laabes, JCA
Jaime A. Acevedo, SCD
Vivian Toro Ortiz, SCD Noroeste
Lisette Fas, Cafiesencia
Juan A. Reyes, AAPR
Pablo Hernández, SCD Noroeste
Edgardo González, DNER
Eliezer Nieves Rodríguez, DNER
Mariana C. León Pérez, FWS*

The following were excused: *Víctor Trinidad, EPA; Ricardo Goenaga, TARS; Ruperto Chaparro, Sea Grant; Leyinska Wiscovitch, APHIS*

Welcome and Introduction:

The moderator, Jaime Valentín, welcomed the audience and announced that the attendance list was passed around. Provided information about the ladies and men's room facilities and alternatives for lunch. Minutes and agenda were distributed by email previously.

Following the announcements, the moderator asked the audience to introduce themselves and excused the members that called to be excused for not attending.

After the introductory remarks by the Moderator, the Chairman led the meeting.

Edwin Almodóvar, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. welcomed the group to the meeting at El Colegio de la Montaña and thanked Lic. Raúl M. Nuñez, Acting Dean, for providing the facilities for the STC meeting and announced that at any time he will be coming to salute the audience.

Following the introduction, he made some announcements concerning the financial situation in the Federal Government and informed that NRCS had a successfully year 2013. The field employees have been working hard. We haven't received the budget for FY-2014. Informed that José A. Castro and Fernando Arroyo will be providing detailed information about what have had happening in NRCS during fiscal year 2013.

He also announced that the new Chief for NRCS is Jason Weller.

José A. Castro, Asst. Director for Programs:

Castro spent considerable time discussing projects such as:

- **Energy** – We have made contracts for almost \$300,000. We have to look for new energy clients in other agricultural enterprises. To request financial assistance for practices implementation, participants need to make an audit. Funds matching could be excellent, as we have done with dairy industry.
- **Livestock** – We have accomplished 60% fund spending required on livestock.
- **Dairy industry** – the initiative with the dairy industry has been excellent, but we want to go further.
- **Seasonal High Toner** – another successful initiative. We have ten projects. Our goal for the next year is 15.
- **Organic agriculture** – We have to improve this area, we only signed 3 contracts for the organic agriculture. There is a problem with the certification; the farmers do not meet the requirements.
- **Coloso** – Two contracts were made. This year we obligated about \$400,000. Districts were part of this project.
- **Guánica project** – Is running. We have to extend the Guánica project as it was planned.
- **Coffee area** – we have to sound that area for the small farmer. That is the function of the STC. We could have CIG proposals looking for innovative projects.
- **AFO/CAFO** – This year we obligated funds for \$100,000. We have to identify the farmers' problems and how other agencies can help in solving those problems.

Expressed that NRCS have to move to other industries. How can we move in the agriculture to those controlled areas? NRCS is working with new options.

- **Forestland** – There are excellent plans. We can obligate 2 contracts or more. Last July we received additional funds on WHIP. These funds were obligated.
- **Cropland** – 124 contracts were obligated. Only 22 contracts in the coastal area. The agriculture is in the mountain, but the higher production is in the coast.

Fernando Arroyo, Asst. Director for Operations:

Fernando announced that this year was successful in funds obligation, technical and financial assistance. Expressed that he is happy to have representation from the Permits agency at the meeting. The Committee should have clear where we will direct our efforts--our efforts should go to the agriculture. He provided an update on:

- **Coloso** - We obligated funds with fast results. DA, SCD and NRCS have been working for more than ten years with this type of project. We have installed irrigation system to avoid using well water that needs electrical power. The energy cost has made that many businessmen close their business. We are installing ponds in the irrigation system to distribute water. We will impact 112 acres with the three contracts we have obligated. We, as a Committee, have the task waiting for the DA on what they want, then we can assist them.

- **Guánica** – We will start distributing water to the lakes. We realized that the larger of the old irrigation systems are obsolete. We will work to update them. We have to make more productive the coastal areas in PR.
- **2014 efforts** – Payment schedules – Payment system on practices to farmers. This system has been improved. At National level there is a policy on what we can or cannot pay. Every 4 months we have a financial audit. This year we can increase our payments.

SUNIA:

Mariana León, Internship student, opened her presentation with a briefing on who was SUNIA. SUNIA was a Governor interested to contribute to the coral reef ecosystems. The summer internship continues the Governor's legacy by providing the university students a unique opportunity to gain valuable professionally formative experience in conservation of coral reef ecosystem. Mariana and María López participated in the internship with the FWS. Mariana gave a summary of accomplishments on:

- **Coral Reef** – not acceptable practices have affected the coral reef at the Guánica Bay. NRCS and FWS have taken some initiatives to take care of that situation; NRCS focusing in agriculture and FWS in wildlife.
- **Trees Planting**- María Cristina recollected all information about the species, organized the nursery area, coordinated visits with NRCS personnel to determine trees to be planted in each zone, coordinated meeting with the farmers to find out the possibility to have demonstration in their farms. One hundred (100) trees were planted in the high zone and 50 in the low zone.
- **Story Map Template** – They are preparing a Solimar. Consists in collecting information concerning services provided by all agencies and non-profit organizations to be posted in the Solimar. We need to collect information of all agencies to prepare the template to publish the agency's information. It has to be updated regularly.
- **Río Loco**- quickly went through the accomplishments in El Rio Loco.
- **Coffee in Shade** – gave a brief summary about the coffee in shade production.
- **Maricao Nursery** – Visit the Maricao's nursery with NOAA personnel.

Edwin thanked Mariana for her presentation that was also exhibited in Atlanta; and for the excellent work she and María did during their internship in FWS and with the collaboration of El Fideicomiso. He encouraged María and Mariana to keep up the good work.

At this time, the moderator took a moment to introduce **Lic Raúl Nuñez, Acting Dean of El Colegio de la Montaña**. The Chairman of the Committee, Edwin Almodóvar, was introduced by the moderator who immediately thanked him for attending the meeting and for the hospitality accorded to the group and for making our meeting both productive and comfortable. Lic Nuñez welcomed the group and offered his excuses for not attending before due to previous commitments. He immediately went on to briefly discuss what the University is offering to their students and expressed that he will enforce the agriculture curriculum. He expressed that he is committed with the agriculture. After his presentation, Lic. Nuñez left the meeting offering their facilities if we need them for future meetings. The Chairman thanked him. The State Technical Committee meeting reconvened.

Subcommittees Report:

- *Wildlife/Wetland/Forestry*

Iván Llerandi (FWS)– Opened his presentation and informed that the committee had a meeting yesterday. He considers that it is necessary to have representation from the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture at the STC meeting. Also representation from the Agricultural Extension Service at the Committee will be productive.

Considerable discussion was held concerning the following:

- **Coloso project** – *asked NRCS for the area management plan to evaluate the project. This was recommended to protect important areas for wildlife.*
- *The Subcommittee will evaluate the Cooperative Agreement between FWS, DNRA and NRCS.*
- **Bosque Modelo** – *Initiative of the DNER - Edgardo provided a presentation to the subcommittee on how they will work with that initiative. Will have meeting twice a year to promote the programs to the farmers. Also provide talks to the farmers focusing on those farmers that have established practices. The activities will be between March to April 2014. Marisol mentioned that funds from EQIP can be used for El Bosque Modelo farmers.*

It was recommended to schedule a meeting with DNER and Envirosurvey for the programs and El Bosque Modelo outreach.

- **Sociedad Ornitologica Puertorriqueña (SOPI, BirdLife in Puerto Rico)** *signed an agreement with Cafiesencia, local NGO, to collaborate in promoting economic sustainability and biodiversity conservation to the production of Ecological Shade-grown Coffee in the important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) of Maricao and Susua in PR.*

Lisette mentioned a marketing study to support the coffee in shade initiative. It could be with a CIG.

They will be working with the curriculum to develop the project. It is projected to be out in 2014 (February or March), in Maricao. Phase 3 (March-July 2014) we work along with different agencies. Phase 4 (August-September 2014) – Certification and final report.

- **Live fences** – *There will be an amendment to the Administrative order from DNER to clarify the intention of the order—live trees will be used as part of the fence, wires may be attached to live trees.*
- **Poultry** - *There will be an initiative to create organizations for monitoring the PR poultry. The subcommittee will be working with the curriculum to develop the project. We expect to have it ready by February or March 2014. The poultry are excellent to eliminate “broca” to the coffee in shade.*

- **Primates** - In the subcommittee meeting, Ricardo López from Primate talked about four phases:
 - ✓ *Removal of Primates. In the Southeast the project has been successful with primates' control. A group of farmers should forward this concern to the Department of Agriculture and ask for their assistance with funds.*
 - ✓ *Ricardo can make a presentation to the affected farmers. Will request to NRCS their support to this initiative with a CIG proposal.*
- **Troughs for livestock** – gave a brief overview about the problems with the wildlife and water quality. The farmers reported that there were death birds in the troughs. Ricardo informed that there are many affected species. Will evaluate to find out a kind of wildlife scape ramp to be installed. Marisol informed that funds were requested in the payment schedule for that practice to be installed by the farmers. Ramps were included in the Payment Schedule for the new design (Wildlife Scape Ramp).
- **Wild Pigs** – *It is another concern. The subcommittee will be working with a proposal. There are reports from Aguas Buenas, Barranquitas, Comerío, Corozal and Naranjito. There are complaints in Añasco, San Germán, Humacao, Utuado and Arecibo. It is necessary to request funds to control this specie.*
- **Bosque de Boquerón** – *there is a problem with the death fishes jumping from the ponds. The subcommittee will visit the area. We will have to identify the ponds' owner to find out a possibility to prepare a management plan.*
- **The Parrot** - *Another initiative as part of El Bosque Modelo is the third population—the parrot. As a subcommittee we can identify those practices to find out how the land owner in that region can be assisted. Juan Rodríguez from El Fideicomiso understands that it is a great initiative and offered their assistance. The Committee will work with practices and El Fideicomiso will work with the modules' implementation. Iván is committed to coordinate a meeting with potential candidates.*

Lisette Fas recommended improving communication between the agencies creating a network of communication of PR Land Authority, NRCS, DNER and PRDA.

- **Seasonal High Tunnel/Organic/People's Garden Initiatives:**

Ismael Matos (NRCS) opened his presentation talking about People's Garden and mentioned places where he had assisted in the establishing community garden, such as:

- *Las Monjas Community's garden: Compost and water catchment facility.*
- *Bo. Capetillo in Río Piedras' garden- summer camp workshops.*
- *Assisted in the establishment and management of la Fortaleza's garden.*
- *Manuel Elizaburu School's garden- summer pest control and maintenance.*
- *Primary school Julio Andino in Villa Prades, Río Piedras - Garden and outdoor classroom established with recycled material.*
- *Comunidad Vista Mar's garden site selection.*
- *Ernesto Marín School in Cayey's garden site selection.*
- *Carlos González High School in Aguada –garden was established in 2 days with students' assistance.*

- *The Seasonal High Tunnel (Hoop house) is a closed roofed structure where the farmer plants in amended soil.*
- *Developed 21 conservation plans.*
- *Organic farm in Maunabo - They are candidates for a CIG because they control pests using compost and effective microbes under roofed conditions. They will receive also a High tunnel under NRCS Initiative.*
- *San Lorenzo- a HighTunnel was planned in a farm that produces in 500 meters of land- they plant in soil, successfully coriander without using banks not tables.*
- *Canóvanas – assigned funds for a High tunnel to plant several crops to make salads and spices.*
- *Cabo Rojo – This farm has organic certification and will have a High Tunnel this year sponsored by NRCS.– Sonia Carlo. This agronomist is also an Organic inspector and an organic certifier.*
- *Arecibo/Camuy – Seasonal High Tunnel retired agronomist, Luis Soto. He will have 2 more acres organic certify and will install a High tunnel with NRCS assistance.*
- *Río Grande – We have a farmer with our conservation plan for High tunnel and for Organic farming for next year.*
- *Orocovis – Seasonal High Tunnel and organic plan for a farmer (lady) that is using cover crops and effective microbes for soil health improvement.*
- *Barceloneta. High tunnel was approved for farmer that was successfully planting in 250 meters using 10x20 “homemade” canopies for planting in soil and catching all his water needs from rain in his irrigation system.*

Matos encouraged adding a compost facility in every High tunnel, because even if the farmer does not produce by-products, this material is needed to improve the soil health in this facility.

Castro recommended that we should promote the compost in the agricultural farm.

New Business: *There not further business to discuss the meeting adjourned. The Chairman expressed his appreciation for attending the meeting.*

Meeting adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Recorded by Nilda González