



## Organic 101: What Organic Farming and Processing Doesn't Allow



Peppers grown in Puerto Rico under the USDA-NRCS Organic Initiative.

When it comes to organic foods, it's just as important to know what isn't allowed as what is. USDA's organic standards are process-based, meaning they establish the rules for an entire system of farming that follows a product from its beginnings on the farm all the way to retail.

Organic products are managed according to defined processes for planting, growing, raising, and handling. For example, the USDA organic label on dairy or meat products means that the animals the products originated from were raised in living conditions that accommodated their natural behaviors, were not administered hormones or antibiotics, and

grazed on pasture grown on healthy soils. Then during processing, the meat or dairy product was handled in a facility that was inspected by an organic certifier; processed without any artificial colors, preservatives, or flavors; and packaged to avoid contact with any prohibited, nonorganic substances.

A very important part of the process-based regulatory framework is prohibiting certain methods in organic production and handling. Irradiation, sewage sludge, and genetic engineering are all expressly prohibited from being used to grow or process organic foods.

Genetic engineering in particular has drawn a lot of attention and concern from consumers and the organic community. In April 2011, the National Organic Program, a part of the USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, issued a policy memo that explained the relationship between genetically modified organisms (GMO) and food production under USDA organic standards.

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## NRCS Caribbean Area Welcomes New Employees



NRCS Caribbean Area's new Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations, Fernando Arroyo.

Nicis Vega, Resource Conservationist in the Caguas Field Office, will be the

NRCS Caribbean Area Director, Edwin Almodóvar, announces that 3 position vacancies have been filled. Fernando Arroyo, Program Specialist in the State Office, will be our new Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations. Fernando starts his new position on

February 12, 2012, providing leadership and supervision to Field Operations staff and conservation partners, and supervising District Conservationists.

new District Conservationist in Juana Diaz. Nicis will start his new position on February 26, 2012. We also welcome Manuel Matos, Soil Scientist from Tavares, Florida, as our new MLRA Mayaguez Soil Survey Leader. Manuel is originally from Jayuya, Puerto Rico. He earned his Bachelor's and Master's Degrees, with honors, in Agronomy and Soils from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez. Manuel joined NRCS in 2004, and has served as a Soil Scientist at the Red River Valley of the North in Fargo, ND; as Area Resource Soil Scientist in Thief River Falls, MN; and as MLRA Soil Survey Leader in Tavares, FL. Manuel will start his new position on April 8, 2012.

Congratulations to all our new employees!



## Director's Corner

Happy New Year to all! As we wrap-up our first month of 2012, our field

office employees are working hard on sign-up for programs, and preparing for what is to be another busy year of conservation implementation. While attending meetings and visiting with partners throughout the Caribbean, I constantly—and with joy—hear about the wonderful role you all are playing in putting conservation on the ground and helping people help the land. I am so proud of you all! Thank you for your dedication and hard work. Many thanks to all who in one way or another help us put the NRCS story together, by playing main characters and supporting roles, and telling the NRCS story to others so well. I sure feel proud when I tell our story.

Make sure you review this and previous editions, and enjoy the stories of the people who give everything to protect our wonderful natural resources in the Caribbean.

Yours in Conservation,  
Edwin Almodóvar  
Director, USDA-NRCS Caribbean Area

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## Organic 101: What Organic Farming and Processing Doesn't Allow *(continued from p.1)*



Tilling row crops in Puerto Rico using USDA-NRCS Organic Initiative methods.

USDA organic regulations prohibit the use of GMOs. GMOs are listed as "excluded methods," and defined as "a variety of methods to genetically modify organisms or influence their growth and development by means that are not possible under natural conditions or processes.... Such prohibited methods include cell fusion, microencapsulation, macroencapsulation, and recombinant DNA technology (including gene deletion, gene doubling, introducing a foreign gene, and changing the positions of genes when achieved by recombinant DNA technology)."

To prevent GMOs from being introduced into organic production, producers do not use genetically modified seeds or

other materials when planting crops. They also work with their certifiers to implement preventative practices that effectively buffer their farms from GMO contamination.

Organic food handlers and processors also ensure that their ingredients are not produced from excluded methods. Certifying agents review and audit all ingredients – not only agricultural ingredients but also other allowed ingredients like baking soda, yeast, dairy cultures, and vitamins – to verify that they are not genetically modified.

All of these measures are documented in operations' organic systems plans. These plans are a crucial element of USDA organic certification that outline detailed practices and procedures to address how operators comply with organic regulation requirements.

No matter where the product is grown or how the product is made, if it has the USDA Organic label on it, genetic engineering or genetically modified organisms are not allowed.

*Reprinted from the USDA Blog Organic 101 series that explores different aspects of USDA's organic regulations. For more information about USDA Organic, please visit: [www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop).*

## Puerto Rico Firm Awarded USDA-RD Rural Energy for America Grant

In November 2011, USDA awarded a \$9,575 Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) feasibility study grant to Puerto Rican firm, Recast Energy, LLC. The REAP Feasibility Grant Program provides grants for energy audits and renewable energy development assistance. It also provides funds to agricultural producers and rural small businesses to conduct feasibility studies for renewable energy systems.

USDA selected 67 projects nationwide, awarding more than \$2.4 million in energy audit and Renewable Energy Development Assistance grants; and more than \$1.2 million to support feasibility study projects.

Funded projects focus on helping rural agricultural producers reduce energy consumption and costs; use renewable energy technologies in their operations; and/or conduct feasibility studies for renewable energy projects. The Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) is authorized by the 2008 Farm Bill.

USDA-RD is now soliciting proposals for FY 2012 funding. Funding is available for feasibility studies, energy audits, renewable energy development, energy efficiency improvement, and energy conservation. REAP loan and grant information is available at: [www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP\\_ReapGrants.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_ReapGrants.html).

## USDA Promotes Renewable Energy in Local Communities

*The following article is from U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack's Weekly Column.*

"Over the past three years, USDA has taken important steps to help meet President Obama's goal of building a secure energy future for our nation. We've helped back the science, research and planning to expand production of biofuels and other bio-based products. We've supported farmers and entrepreneurs working to produce renewable energy or become more energy efficient.

"We want Americans to learn about our good work and also to see how their community can get involved in an expanding renewable energy and bio-based economy that is creating jobs and driving economic growth across rural America.

"So USDA launched a new energy website to serve as a one-stop shop for data about

energy efficiency and renewable energy programs at USDA. It builds on my commitment to make sure that USDA is using the most up-to-date technology to deliver modern and efficient service.

"In today's competitive rural business environment, we need to help farmers, ranchers and small businesses learn about funding opportunities to improve their bottom line with energy efficiency and renewable energy efforts. A great way for them to get started is by visiting [www.USDA.gov/energy](http://www.USDA.gov/energy).

"The new energy website provides access to all USDA energy resources, including agricultural, forestry, economic, and social data. A set of new web-based tools, including a Renewable Energy Investment Map and an Energy Matrix, focus on USDA's investments and projects, providing useful information to a broad spectrum of stakeholders. It makes it easy to navigate USDA's energy resources. In

addition, the site provides a link so you can find energy experts in USDA's state and local offices.



"Every day, USDA is investing in rural communities across the country to drive job growth and a better future for the middle class. And sometimes, we hear from our customers about the need to reduce red tape and modernize our services. This energy website helps answer that challenge: making the best use of taxpayer resources to help provide the best possible service to the American people.

"I hope you'll take a moment to visit the website at [www.USDA.gov/energy](http://www.USDA.gov/energy)."

## “Haciendo Ambiente” with NRCS Mayagüez Field Office



Agronomist Angel Luis Gonzalez, Oeste SWCD member and Radio Program collaborator, talks with farmers about avocado varieties.



Mayagüez Field Office volunteer, Rosario Zamora, provides NRCS information to fair attendees.

NRCS Mayagüez Field Office staff provided outreach about NRCS programs and services to more than 300 attendees of *The Mayagüez Second Fruit Fair*, held Sunday, August 28, 2011. The Fair was sponsored by the UPR Agricultural Extension Service, PR Department of Agriculture and Radio Program “*Haciendo Ambiente*,” and was held at Radio Paraiso.

NRCS staff, volunteers and members of the Oeste Soil & Water Conservation District participated in the fair, delivering educational materials, posters and flyers about conservation practices to fair participants. Other agencies, including APHIS Veterinary Services and Plant Protection Quarantine Services, and the PR Department of Natural Resources also had exhibits at the fair. The fair promoted fruits produced by the farmers of the Oeste and Suroeste Soil & Water Conservations Districts. The delicious and nutritious produce was also sold by local farmers at their booths and exhibits.

## Meet the Juana Diaz Field Office



Juana Diaz F.O. staff (L-R): Anibal Velázquez, Felipe Acosta (retired), Ramona Maldonado (retired), Ramón Báez, Lydia Bravo, Zahira Vega, and Luis H. Rosado. Not in picture: Rolando Col-lazo and Nicis Vega, new District Conservationist.

The Juana Diaz Field Office is located in the Southern Coastal Plains region of Puerto Rico. This office, provides conservation planning, implementation and technical support to private land owners, farmers, and local agencies to protect Puerto Rico’s natural resources. The Juana Diaz office serves 14 municipalities from the plains of Guayama to the mountains of Adjuntas. Their service area represents a wide variety of land conditions and needs requiring diverse conservation planning expertise.

The Juana Diaz Field Office provides a range of management options to clients

through federally-funded programs such as WHIP, CIG, EQIP, and CSP. They provide expert soil technical consultation to the public, collaborate with local community groups, and educate our citizens about conservation methods and principles in order to ‘*Help the People Help the Land.*’

Recently, the Juana Diaz Field Office added two highly qualified individuals to their staff: Zahira Vega (Soil Conservation Technician) and Rolando Col-lazo (Civil Engineer). Also, District Conservationist Felipe Acosta and Resource Conservationist Ramona Maldonado retired in December 2011. They both contributed over 30 years of dedicated and invaluable service to the Caribbean Area NRCS. We wish them the very best with all their future endeavors, and welcome Nicis Vega as the new Juana Diaz District Conservationist!

For assistance, please contact the Juana Diaz Field Office at 787-837-4450 or visit the office at USDA-NRCS, Plaza Juana Diaz – B19, Intersection of State Rd. 149 & 584, Juana Diaz, PR 00795.

## NRCS Plant Materials Specialist Honored with National Award



NRCS Caribbean Area Director, Edwin Almodóvar, presents 2010 Plant Materials Program Meritorious Service Award to Edwin Más.

NRCS Caribbean Area Director, Edwin Almodóvar, is pleased to announce that Plant Materials Specialist, Edwin Más, has received the **2010 NRCS Plant Materials Program Meritorious Service Award!**

Edwin is a leader in vegetation application in tropical areas. He has significantly influenced plant materials activities in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and around the world. His teaching and publication of numerous technical guides will continue to influence natural resource conservation in the Caribbean. Edwin is truly a team player - his experience and contributions are invaluable. Said Director Almodóvar, “*We all can see why Edwin Más is a recipient of this award, his leadership and dedication to this agency truly merit one of our best to be recognized. Congratulations Edwin on a very well-deserved award and thanks for making us proud.*”

## NRCS Staffer Promotes Conservation on the Air

NRCS Resource Conservationist, Raquel Robledo, took to the airwaves this fall to promote conservation in the Caribbean Area. Ms. Robledo appeared on Radio Paraiso’s early morning (7:00—8:00 a.m.) radio program hosted by Oeste SWCD member, Angel Gonzalez.



NRCS Resource Conservationist, Raquel Robledo.

On the October 03, 2011 show, she introduced 3 key USDA initiatives: ***The Peoples Garden***, ***Know Your Farmer***, and ***Know Your Food and Choose My Plate***, and discussed their relationship to sustainability. Her focus on the November 17, 2011, show was the “CORE-4” conservation concept. She provided listeners with details about conservation tillage, crop nutrient management, pest management and conservation buffers.

On the December 05, 2011 show, Ms. Robledo discussed details of the NRCS Tree Planting conservation practice, using “A Tree Planting Guide for Puerto Rico and other Caribbean Countries” for reference. For more information, please contact Ms. Robledo at 787-831-3454 x 101 or [Raquel.robledo@pr.usda.gov](mailto:Raquel.robledo@pr.usda.gov).

## 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Governor Tauese P.F. Sunia Memorial Coral Reef Conservation Summer Internship in the Caribbean Area



Green sea turtle resting in sea grass (Photo courtesy of DPNR-CZM St. Croix East End Marine Park).

The U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF); U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), DOI Office of Insular Affairs, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration seek college student applicants for the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Governor Tauese P.F. Sunia Memorial Coral Reef Conservation Summer Internship for the Caribbean Area.

This internship recognizes the late Governor's outstanding leadership and contribution to U.S. coral reef ecosystem conservation. Governor Sunia is most remembered for being an eloquent and impassioned advocate for coral reef protection and management at the local level, not only in his native American Samoa, but throughout the U.S. and Pacific region. This summer internship continues the Governor's legacy. It provides an outstanding college or university student with a unique opportunity to gain valuable, professionally-formative experience in coral reef conservation policy and management, while also contributing to the overall efforts of FWS and the USCRTF.

The 8-10 week summer internship is designed for a student pursuing a career in natural resource management and/or coral reef ecosystems. The student intern will work at the Caribbean National Wildlife Refuge and contribute to the Guánica Bay/Río Loco Watershed Partnership. The internship covers salary and transportation costs, and provides the selected student

with career-enhancing experience working on coral reef conservation and management initiatives. The student will have productive, hands-on job assignments in watershed management and natural resource conservation and enhancement related to coral reef ecosystems and initiatives in the Caribbean Area. The selected student will be paid by FWS and must be willing to work a full-time schedule during the summer.

To be eligible, students must be:

1. At least 18 years old and a U.S. citizen;
2. Enrolled or accepted for enrollment as a degree-seeking student in an accredited technical or vocational school, 2-year or 4-year college or university, or graduate or professional school; and
3. Taking at least a half-time course load as determined by the academic institution.

All applicants wishing to be considered for the Sunia internship should submit:

- Unofficial copies of all college and/or university transcripts.
- A resume with relevant experience and activities.
- One letter of recommendation from a professor or relevant employer.
- A 750-word essay (maximum) on the importance of managing coral reefs in your island jurisdiction and nationally; and how this internship will benefit your coral reef management career goals.

Application materials must be received **no later than 5:00 p.m. EST on February 29, 2012**, and can be mailed or emailed to:

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service-Southeast Region  
1875 Century Blvd, Suite 200  
Atlanta, GA 30345  
Attn: Nikki Lamp, Ph.D.  
Ph: 404-679-7118  
Email: [nikki\\_lamp@fws.gov](mailto:nikki_lamp@fws.gov)

## 2012 Combined Federal Campaign Results

Thank you to all NRCS Caribbean Area employees for your generosity in contributing to families, children and communities in need! This year we raised \$5,203.98 for the 2012 Combined Federal Campaign — 86 percent of our \$6,000 goal. Congratulations to all for the incredible participation in this year's fund-raising drive to extend a helping hand to others.

## Activities & Events

- Caribbean Area Civil Rights Review, February 6-10, 2012
- ENTSC Using RUSLE in Organic Systems Webinar, February 14, 2012, 3:00-4:00 p.m.
- 34<sup>th</sup> Coffee Finishing Festival, February 17-19, 2012, Johnny Arbona Quinones Municipal Parking Lot, Maricao, PR
- St. Croix Agriculture & Food Fair, February 18-20, 2012, VI Dept. of Agriculture Fair Grounds, USVI
- State Technical Committee Meeting, February 22, 2012, 9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m., El Fideicomiso offices, Caguas, PR
- U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting, February 23, 2012, Washington, DC
- 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Kite Festival, February 26, 2012, 11:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m., Castillo San Felipe del Morro, San Juan, PR
- ENTSC Essential Principles for Conservation Planning on Pastures Webinar, February 29, 2012, 3:00-4:00 p.m.
- San Juan Orchid Festival, March 9-11, 2012, Pedrín Zorrilla Coliseum, San Juan, PR
- Annual Orange Festival, March 22-25, 2012, Las Marias, PR
- Agropolis, March 23-25, 2012, Parque Ecologico, Dorado, PR
- ENTSC Nutrient Management in No-Till Cropping Systems Webinar, March 28, 2012, 3:00-4:00 p.m.

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