



NRCS Caribbean Area Commemorates USDA's 150th Anniversary!

On May 15, 2012, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) celebrated 150 years of work on behalf of agriculture, rural America and people throughout the country and world.

In the midst of the Civil War in 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed an act of Congress into law establishing USDA. Two and one-half years later in his final annual message to Congress, Lincoln called USDA "The People's Department." At that time, about half of all Americans lived on farms—compared with only 2 percent today.

Since then, USDA has helped support the tremendous growth and success of American agriculture, drive economic growth, conserve natural resources, and build

stronger communities and a stronger nation.

Said USDA Secretary, Tom Vilsack, "For 150 years, USDA has supported our nation's economic prosperity and touched the lives of generations of Americans. I'm proud of the USDA employees who carry out President Lincoln's legacy throughout the country and around the world, making USDA a truly 'Every Day, Every Way' department. Whether improving domestic and international access to food, promoting nutrition and safety of our food supply, conserving our natural resources, advancing agricultural exports, or developing the rural economy, USDA helps Americans lead better lives."

Please visit our 150th Anniversary website at www.usda.gov/USDA150 to find out more about our history and the year-long celebration. You can also sign-up to receive historical USDA factoids and photos delivered right to your inbox.



Director's Corner

As we celebrate our 150th anniversary, we continue working hard to implement conservation on the ground and strive to become a better organization.

It is hard to believe summer is just around the corner. Along with our summer months - and BBQ, sun and longer days - our Caribbean Area faces another challenging hurricane season. We need to be prepared to protect life and livelihood.

I appreciate your commitment and dedication to this great agency and to your families. That is why I ask that you set aside some time this month to update your emergency plans and prepare for another hurricane season.

Enjoy your summer, you very well deserve it. Be safe.

Yours in Conservation,

Edwin Almodóvar, Director
USDA-NRCS Caribbean Area

Pachamama Forest Garden Works with the NRCS Organic Initiative to Create a Sustainable Farm



Volunteer installs hillside ditch designed by NRCS in Pachamama Forest Garden.

Over 10 inches of rain fell along Puerto Rico's West Coast this past March, in a season that is usually dry. While a blessing, heavy rains can also cause complications for farmers. Raquel Robledo, Resource Conservationist with the Mayagüez NRCS Field Office, is helping Pachamama Forest Garden owner, Magha García, control runoff and

conserve resources on her farm through the NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Organic Initiative.

Pachamama Forest Garden is a thirteen-acre secondary forest farm in the Uroyaon Mountain Range between Mayagüez, Añasco and Las Marías. The Pachamama project uses a low impact approach to create a sustainable family farm. The concepts they are applying include: agroecology, agroforestry, silviculture, permaculture, holistic and conservation farming.

Through the NRCS conservation planning process, Pachamama Forest Garden is installing practices to control storm water runoff flowing from the hills towards the valley where many food crops are planted. One practice, a hillside ditch, was built along the contour to repair one of their biggest problems: an old road created by all-terrain

(Continued on page 2)

USDA at 150 Factoid

In 1900, 39.2 percent of the U.S. population lived on farms, compared to 1.8 percent in 1990.

Inside this Issue:

NRCS Caribbean Area Commemorates USDA's 150 th Anniversary	1
Director's Corner	1
Pachamama Forest Garden Works with the NRCS Organic Initiative to Create a Sustainable Farm	1-2
U.S. EPA Region 2 Honors Puerto Rico & U.S. Virgin Islands Environmental	2
Rural Development Aid Available for Farmers	2
Meet the Utuado Field Office	3
Organic 101: What the USDA Organic Label Means	3
NRCS Recognizes Women Agronomists During March 2012 Women's Week	3
NRCS Caribbean Area Celebrates Earth Week with Outreach Activities	4
Workshop Provides Río Loco Watershed Project Update	4
Activities & Events	4

Pachamama Forest Garden Works with the NRCS Organic Initiative to Create a Sustainable Farm



(Continued from page 1)

vehicles (ATVs). After digging a 115-foot long hillside ditch, Ms. García started to see an immediate improvement in one of Pachamama's fields. In less than a year, vegetation has grown up along the eroded ruts and bare, muddy areas damaged by motorcycles and ATVs, helping to protect the soil.



LEFT: Volunteers dig plant beds on January 20, 2012 (top) and small herb garden built with local stones dug from plant beds (bottom). ABOVE: Casey River in flood during March rains.



Ms. García and farm volunteers have started subsistence ecological planting of edible crops, and are continuing their work moving fallen trees, exploring the land for nature trails, inventorying flora and fauna, developing a biodiversity conservation plan and managing the farm's natural resources. In this way, they will gradually integrate as many concepts of sustainability as possible. To follow Pachamama Forest Garden's activities, visit their blog at: <http://pachamamapr.blogspot.com>. For details on the EQIP Organic Program, contact your local NRCS Field Office or visit our website at www.pr.nrcs.usda.gov.

Rural Development Aid Available for Farmers

The USDA Rural Development (RD) agency encourages Caribbean Area farmers to participate in their assistance programs. The **Value Added Producer Grant (VAPG)** Program is a grant-only program to help agricultural producers enter into value-added activities. Applications can be submitted for **either** planning or working capital, but not both. RD seeks projects to market value-added agricultural products and/or for farm-based renewable energy. Applicants must provide a 50 percent match for awarded funds. For VAPG Program details, visit www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_VAPG_Grants.html. The **Small Minority Producer Grant Program** is also available for Caribbean Area farmers. For details, please visit www.rurdev.usda.gov/pr/ or www.rurdev.usda.gov/fl/ (for USVI clients) or contact your local Rural Development office.

U.S. EPA Region 2 Honors Puerto Rico & U.S. Virgin Islands Environmental Leaders

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has honored an environmental educational project, a media organization and a business in Puerto Rico and two organizations in the U.S. Virgin Islands with Environmental Quality Awards for their success in protecting public health and the environment. EPA Regional Administrator Judith A. Enck presented this year's awards to recipients at a ceremony held April 22 at EPA's offices in Manhattan.

"Change that will create a healthier and more sustainable future begins with people like those the EPA is honoring today," said Administrator Enck. *"They give of themselves and set a high bar in their actions to protect public health and the environment."*

EPA presents the Environmental Quality Awards every year during Earth Week. Awards are given to individuals, businesses, government agencies, environmental and community-based organizations and members of the media in EPA Region 2, which includes Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The awards recognize significant contributions to improving the environment and public health in the previous calendar year. For details about the EPA Region 2 Environmental Quality Awards, visit www.epa.gov/region02/eqa.

The **2012 PR & USVI Environmental Quality Award winners** are:

Business and Industry—Green Way Express has programs in emissions control, technology, education and community relations in Puerto Rico. Green Way Express reduced their energy use, resulting in 27% lower CO2 emissions. They also started a recycling program, which diverted 3,276 lbs of waste from landfills last year. Green Way Express now recycles 91% of all waste they produce, providing unique supply chain solutions to reduce their environmental impact.

Environmental Education—Proyecto Recinto Verde (Green Campus Project) is an initiative of the Inter-American University of Puerto Rico. The project promotes environmental protection and conservation awareness through environmental education in academic and community settings. Focus areas include administration, recycling, reforestation, health education and conservation. They aim to positively impact local ecosystems and achieve a better quality of life for the university and its community.

Press and Media—Miprv.com. In 2011, Mi Puerto Rico Verde (My Green Puerto Rico), a website offering tips on how to lead a green lifestyle, changed its editorial section to in-

clude news and events related to energy and the environment in Puerto Rico. The coverage provided on Miprv.com has provided crucial education to the public about the proposed Via Verde pipeline project, solar energy, windmills and other environmental news and advancements. The site also promotes the importance of conserving aquatic resources.

Environmental Education—Beyond Victims Foundation has made environmental education, awareness, advocacy and stewardship its mission since 1997. Its efforts across the U.S. Virgin Islands have helped a diverse range of communities by providing youth education, community assessment programs and health awareness initiatives.

Non-Profit Organization, Environmental or Community Group—Island Green Building Association (IGBA) created the first and only Residential Tropical Green Building Certification program to promote sustainable tropical architecture and environmental preservation on St. John, USVI. In 2012, IGBA established the St. John Resource Depot to reuse and recycle construction materials, and they hold monthly environmental education meetings open to the public.

Meet the Utuado Field Office



Utuado Field Office staff from left to right: Israel Vega, District Conservationist; Evelyn Rivera, Soil Conservation Technician; and Norberto Valentín, Soil Conservationist.

The NRCS Utuado Field Office serves the people of Utuado and Jayuya, Puerto Rico from the USDA Service Center on Fernando L. Ribas Avenue in Utuado.

The team of Israel Vega, Norberto Valentín and Evelyn Rivera bring a wealth of experience in specialized areas of agronomy, botany, soil, water and energy conservation. We are co-located with the Farm Service Agency and Rural Development offices to provide a one-stop center for your farm and rural home loan needs.

Currently, the NRCS Utuado FO is working with non-traditional partners—the U.S. Fish

& Wildlife Service (USFWS) and EnviroSurvey, Inc.—to establish an effective outreach, planning and technical assistance relationship between the agencies to implement EQIP contracts. The goal of this innovative effort between the 3 agencies is to establish effective conservation strategy for area coffee plantations.

Studies have shown that native tree species provide beneficial shade to conserve resources and improve wildlife habitat on coffee plantations. All three agencies are partnering to ensure that the correct type and number of tree species will be planted to meet agency standards and specifications. The species they are working with are: Moca (*Andira inermis*), Guaba (*Inga vera*), Guamá (*Inga laurina*) and Capá Prieto (*Cordia alliodora*). Since the USFWS and EnviroSurvey nursery produces only species approved to establish shade coffee plantations, the agencies have a verbal agreement to use this resource for active EQIP contracts with **multi-story cropping (379)** practices to be implemented in 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Please call us at 787-894-1480 or stop our offices for further information or assistance in conserving our natural resources!

NRCS Recognizes Women Agronomists During March 2012 Women's Week

NRCS female staff were honored on March 9, 2012, during a Puerto Rico College of Agronomists (CAPR) event to celebrate Women's History Week. The activity featured presentations tailored to female agronomists and a recognition ceremony where managers from all represented agencies honored Female Agronomists from their workforce.

Over 100 women agronomists representing various local and federal government agencies and private industry participated in the event.



FWPM Lydia E. Collazo (left) and ASTC for Field Operations, Fernando Arroyo (right) recognized Zahira Vega (center left) and Linette Rosado (center right).

Organic 101: What the USDA Organic Label Means



Between nutrition facts, ingredient lists, and dietary claims on food packages, "organic" might seem to be just one more claim to decipher when food shopping.

Understanding what "organic" really means can help us make more informed choices during our next visit to the grocery store or farmers' market.

USDA-certified organic foods are grown and processed according to federal guidelines that govern factors like soil quality, animal-raising practices, pest and weed control, and use of additives. Organic producers rely on natural substances and physical, mechanical, or biologically-based farming methods as much as possible.

Produce can be called organic if it's certified to have grown on soil that had no prohibited substances applied for three years prior to harvest. Prohibited substances include most synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. When a grower has to use a synthetic substance, it must first be approved according to criteria that look at its effects on human health and the environment (see

"Organic 101: Allowed and Prohibited Substances" in our March 2012 issue).

Organic meat regulations require animals to be raised in living conditions that allow their natural behaviors (like pasture grazing), be fed 100% organic feed and forage, and not given antibiotics or hormones.

For processed, multi-ingredient foods, USDA organic standards specify more factors. Regulations prohibit organically-processed foods from containing artificial preservatives, colors, or flavors. They also require that ingredients are organic, with some minor exceptions. For example, processed organic foods may contain some approved non-agricultural ingredients, like enzymes in yogurt, pectin in fruit jams, or baking soda in baked goods.

When packaged products are labeled that they are "made with organic [whatever ingredient]," this means they contain at least 70% organically-produced ingredients. The remaining non-organic ingredients are produced without using prohibited practices (genetic engineering, for example) but can include substances that may not

otherwise be allowed in 100% organic products. "Made with organic" products do not have the USDA organic seal, but must still identify the USDA-accredited certifier. You can look for the certifier's identity on packaged products to verify that they meet USDA's organic standards.

As with all organic foods, none should be grown or handled using genetically modified organisms, which organic standards expressly prohibit (see "**Organic 101: What Organic Farming and Processing Doesn't Allow**" in our January 2012 issue).

Be an empowered consumer—make informed decisions about the food you purchase by becoming familiar with what the USDA organic label means. While there are many marketing claims that add value to foods, be assured that USDA organic products are verified organic at all steps between the farm and the store.

Reprinted from the USDA Organic 101 blog series that explores different parts of USDA's organic regulations. For details about USDA Organic, please visit: www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/nop.

San Sebastián Field Office Celebrates Earth Week with Outreach Activities!



SCT Michelle Catoni (bottom right) and SC Javier Torres (top row, 5th from right) pose with RUM students while visiting the Patiño Farm in Aguada, PR.

For Earth Week 2012, San Sebastián Field Office staff Javier Torres (Soil Conservationist) and Michelle Catoni (Soil Conservation Technician) led a two-day field visit for 29 University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez (RUM) students and two professors to Mr. Sigfredo Patiño's Farm in Aguada, PR.

NRCS staff partnered with the Northwest Conservation District and RUM professors to familiarize students with EQIP conservation practices established in the Coloso Valley and other San Sebastián Field Office

districts, and the instruments staff use in the field to put conservation on the ground.

The two-day field visit highlighted common conservation practices applied on the Patiño farm such as contour planting, crop rotation, nutrient management and pest management. Staff also demonstrated how they used various survey instruments to design and install conservation practices in the field and distributed a factsheet to the students describing NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) and Earth Team Volunteer Program.

For details or to schedule an outreach activity with the San Sebastián Field Office, please call 787-896-3565 or 787-896-2987.



ABOVE: SC Torres demonstrates survey equipment use to RUM students visiting the Patiño Farm. BELOW LEFT: SCT Catoni shows RUM student how to use a hand level.

USDA at 150 Factoid

In 2009, 8,569 U.S. farmers reported producing renewable energy on their farms, saving an average of \$2,406 on their utility bills.

Workshop Provides Río Loco Watershed Project Update



Participants in UPR Sea Grants Rio Loco workshop listen to partner presentations.

On March 15, 2012, NRCS participated in a University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez Sea Grant workshop to update stakeholders on the efforts to improve the Río Loco River Watershed in Guánica, PR. Representatives from local and federal government agencies, as well as the general public attended.

NRCS Caribbean Area Director, Edwin Almodóvar, welcomed participants to the workshop, then Engineer Lydia E. Collazo

delivered a presentation on soil bioengineering practices for stream bank restoration.

NRCS Resource Conservationist, Mario Rodríguez, spoke about NRCS's Coral Reef Initiative project in Guánica Bay & Río Loco. Plant Materials Specialist, Edwin Más, followed up with a presentation describing conservation practices applicable to the Río Loco Watershed. Also assisting was Soil Conservation Technician, Harry Maldonado.

Other workshop topics included: the Initiative for Río Loco Watershed Conservation and Restoration, Runoff Management applicable for Río Loco Watershed (by EPA); and Shade Coffee Initiative (by USFWS). For details on the Guánica / Río Loco Initiative, please contact Mario Rodríguez at 787-831-3101 x116 or Mario.rodriguez@pr.usda.gov.

Activities & Events

- **Guánica Crab Festival, June 15 -17, 2012, at the Malecón.**
- **Mango Festival, June 15-17, 2012, Eudaldo Báez García Blvd., Mayaguez, www.mayaguezpr.gov**
- **Paso Fino Competition, June 17, 2012, Vieques Club Equestre, Barrio Santa María**
- **ENTSC Management of Manure Nutrients Webinar, June 27, 2012, 2:00-3:00 p.m.**
- **Lajas Agricultural Fair, June 29-July 1, 2012, Route 116, Casa Grande sector, Lajas, PR**
- **Mango Melee, July 1, 2012, St. George's Village Botanical Garden, St. Croix, USVI**
- **ENTSC Soil Moisture-based Irrigation Scheduling: Theory & Practice Webinar, July 12, 2012, 2:00-3:00 p.m.**
- **ENTSC Climate Smart Agriculture: Intro to Agro-Climate Information & Decision Support System Webinar, July 19, 2012, 2:00-3:00 p.m.**
- **Castillo San Felipe del Morro Artisan Fair, July 20-23, 2012, 10:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m., El Morro, San Juan, PR**
- **ENTSC River Science for Non-Engineers Webinar, July 25, 2012, 3:00-4:00 p.m.**
- **ENTSC Establishing & Maintaining Habitat for Pollinators & Beneficial Insects Webinar, August 14, 2012, 3:00-4:00 p.m.**
- **ENTSC Design of Silage Leachate Collection Systems Webinar, August 29, 2012, 3:00-4:00 p.m.**

Helping People Help the Land...

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