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Who We Are

Inspired by a shared vision of agriculture as a valued component of the landscape, NRCS works in partnership with farmers, ranchers and many others to improve, restore and protect the Nation's natural resources.

Side-by-side with these partners, we work to sustain and improve the quality of our soil, water, air and wildlife habitat, and we develop conservation plans that work for the land and for farmers and ranchers. Farm Bill programs help with the cost of putting conservation on the ground, which benefits the farm, the watershed and the community. Conservation easement programs, also in the Farm Bill, help to protect the agricultural and natural resource value of the land over the long-term.

With our help, the Caribbean Area is balancing economic goals with a high quality environment—ensuring productive lands to supply food, fiber, forest and energy products for the Nation and the world.



Sediment eroded from damaged streambeds in Guánica watershed impacts downstream coral reefs.

Collaboration to Improve and Protect Coral Reef Habitat

The Guánica-Río Loco Watershed Project is a multi-agency effort to preserve and protect coral reef ecosystems. The Guánica-Río Loco Watershed is located in the southwest corner of Puerto Rico and covers portions of Guánica, Yauco, Lajas and Cabo Rojo counties. The Guánica Bay Watershed Management Plan outlines 4 main projects in the watershed to meet U.S. Coral Reef Task Force goals and objectives.

NRCS is supporting coral reef protection goals by working with producers in the watershed to voluntarily implement conservation practices to avoid, control, and trap sediment and nutrient runoff and improve wildlife habitat while maintaining agricultural productivity. Over 4,000 acres in the watershed have been enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) to benefit over 250 square miles of marine ecosystem to date. At least \$3.5 million has been obligated to date, funding over 50 conservation plans. Practices installed include:

- Three 3-acre water reservoirs,
- Two 3-acre sediment basins,
- 5,500 feet of open channels,
- 6,000 feet of pipeline,
- 4,500 feet of grassed waterways, and
- Pump houses with irrigation system upgrades to serve \approx 900 acres.

Partnership accomplishments include:

- Over 30 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) partners,
- Over 10 federal, state, and local government agency partners, and
- Over 1000 hours of in-kind services provided by NGO's.

Soil & Water Quality Enhancement

Conserving soil to improve water quality & reduce sedimentation of coral reefs.

The EQIP Organic Initiative targets currently certified organic producers and those transitioning to organic farming, helping them to plan and implement conservation practices to make their organic operations environmentally sustainable. In FY 2011, NRCS approved 5 Organic Transition contracts for local producers for a total of \$48,692. The contracts assist vegetable and root crop producers whose farms are located in steep areas with many limitations for crop production. Resource Management Systems will be developed for these farms to address soil erosion and water quality resource concerns. The primary conservation practices planned for the EQIP Organic contracts are crop rotation, residue management-no till, residue management-mulch till, riparian forest buffer, vegetative barriers, contour farming, nutrient management and integrated pest management.



NRCS is helping coffee growers to transition from sun-grown coffee to shade-grown coffee to conserve soil and improve water quality and wildlife habitat.

Energy Conservation

Help producers save money and conserve energy.

NRCS & the Puerto Rico Milk Industry Development Fund launched an initiative to help dairy producers transition to more energy efficient operations. The Energy Initiative funds individual on-farm energy audits designed to save farmers both money and energy. To kick-off the program, the National Association of Resource Conservation & Development Councils held a Farm Energy Audit Data Collector Training certification workshop in April 2011 for 16 PR government agency personnel and private engineers. Trainees have completed 25 of 50 on-farm energy audits for selected eligible participants to identify how farm operations can become more energy-efficient and use audit results to develop cost-effective Agricultural Energy Management Plan (AgEMPs). NRCS approved 60 Energy Audit contracts for \$88,372 in FY 2011.



Energy audit trainees assess operations at a dairy farm in Puerto Rico.

Fish & Wildlife Habitat

Provide vital habitat for threatened and endangered species.

During FY 2011, NRCS Caribbean proudly enrolled 284.5 wetland acres in Guayanilla, PR, in the Wetlands Reserve Program, a \$1.6 million dollar perpetual easement. This new WRP enrollment - the first one since 1996 - is bringing the community together as NRCS helps provide clean water and increase water quantity while protecting a valuable resource. Additionally, \$107,496 in WHIP funds were obligated to promote habitat restoration in the buffer area of the Maricao State Forest, funding 10 applications to improve 380 acres of upland habitat. This area is the proposed site to establish a third population of the endangered Puerto Rican Parrot (*Amazona vittata*), and is the home of the Elfin Woods Warbler (*Dendroica angelae*, a candidate for federal Endangered Species Act protection). Other targeted species include Puerto Rican Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), Puerto Rico Nightjar (*Caprimulgus noctitherus*), Puerto Rican boa (*Epicrates inornatus*) and Neotropical migratory birds.



Profile view of the endangered Puerto Rican Parrot, *Amazona vittata*.

Conservation Technical Assistance (CTA) *is simply about helping people help the land. NRCS has used CTA successfully for more than 75 years to reach out to American farmers, ranchers, and other private landowners and managers.*

America's farmers and ranchers invest in conservation with help from CTA to care for the more than 70 percent of our land, water and other natural resources that are in their hands. In FY2011 the Caribbean Area received \$4.2 million in CTA funds.

NRCS employees work with customers to identify natural resource problems, inventory resources, develop conservation alternatives and help individual farmers, ranchers, Tribes, local governments and urban landowners with their conservation decisions. This prepares the way for using Farm Bill and other conservation funding.

Financial Assistance for Working Lands:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) — promotes agricultural production, forest management and environmental quality as compatible goals.

Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)—improves wildlife habitat on private agricultural and forest lands.

Conservation Easements:

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)—restores wetlands and wetland habitat on marginal agricultural land

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)—restores and protects grassland, rangeland and pastureland, and helps maintain viable ranching operations.

Stewardship:

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)—encourages long-term comprehensive conservation by maintaining and improving existing conservation measures.

Watershed and Community-Wide Programs:

Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWP) —undertakes emergency measures in watersheds where there are imminent threats to life and property resulting from fire, flood and other natural disasters.

2011 Conservation Technical Assistance Projects (CTAP)

NRCS funded 7 Caribbean Area CTAP projects to enhance partnerships to accomplish Agency conservation objectives:



Severely eroded stream bed in St. Croix East End pasture.

St. Croix East End Priority Watersheds Engineering Design: Awarded to the St. Croix Environmental Association to complete engineering designs to restore a severely eroded stream channel and a 5-mile dirt road network in 2 key priority sub-watersheds draining to the St. Croix East End Marine Park.

Caribbean Conservation Documentary: Awarded to Geo Ambiente del Caribe, Inc. to produce 2 HD videos highlighting the achievements of NRCS and local partners in conserving, improving, and sustaining the Caribbean's natural resources and environment.

Puerto Rican Parrot Habitat Conservation Initiative: Partnership with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to help Guánica/Rio Loco farmers convert coffee plantations from sun coffee to shade coffee to establish a corridor between Maricao and Guilarte Forests to improve wildlife habitat.

NRCS & PR Conservation Districts Partnership: Awarded to Caribe & Suroeste SWCDs to implement water conservation and runoff control practices to conserve water and reduce pollutant transport to surface waters in the Rio Loco/Guánica and South Aquifer watersheds.

PR Energy Conservation & Organic Farming Initiative: Awarded to Innovation Fund for Agricultural Development in partnership with the PR Department of Agriculture to increase farmer implementation of conservation practices and participation in NRCS' energy and organic initiatives.

PR Nutrient Management Outreach Initiative: Awarded to Atkins Caribe to conduct training workshops and outreach activities to increase farmers' understanding of the nutrient management process, crop nutrient needs, and proper soil sampling techniques.

The Caribbean Area in The National Landscape

NRCS Helps Repair Puerto Rico Communities Devastated by Hurricane Irene

On August 25, 2011, NRCS made \$200,000 available through the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program to assist Puerto Rico communities that suffered watershed damages from Hurricane Irene. EWP helps reduce threats to life and property from watershed impairment (such as erosion, debris, and sediment) that can cause additional flooding, erosion, and damage to infrastructure.



Flooded areas in Loiza, PR, September 1, 2011.

Photo: Elluid Echevarria, FEMA

NRCS and the US Fish & Wildlife Service Partner to Improve Habitat in Guánica/ Rio Loco Watershed

NRCS's Plant Materials Program has partnered with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) to collect, propagate and increase native tree and shrub species in Puerto Rico's Rio Loco/ Guánica watershed. This NRCS-funded project demonstrates local and federal agencies working together to conserve, protect and improve habitat for trust species including migratory birds; threatened, endangered and candidate species; and coral reefs.

FWS/NWR is propagating 690 native/ endemic trees and shrubs to be planted on two NRCS demonstration farms in the watershed. NRCS will develop Plant Guides for each of the species produced; develop on-farm planning and application standards incorporating use of these native species in the Rio Loco/Guánica watershed into NRCS conservation practices; and establish on-farm demonstrations using the selected native tree/shrub species. The ultimate goal is to produce 11,000 trees for distribution.



Salt flat vegetation provides critical habitat for migratory birds and endangered species.

2011 Farm Bill Program Funding

NRCS Program	Dollars Obligated	# of Contracts/ Easements
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)	\$4.6 million	415
Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)	\$1.7 million	1
Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)	\$0.1 million	10

Quick Facts

Number of Employees	62
Number of Field Offices	9
Number of Soil and Water Conservation Districts	17
Acres of Cropland (PR)	115,00
Acres of Pastureland (PR)	204,000
Acres of Cropland (USVI)	5,000
Acres of Pastureland (USVI)	5,000
Acres of conservation planning completed	20,392
Acres of cropland conservation applied to improve soil quality	8,741
Acres of conservation applied to improve water quality	19,085
Acres of irrigation improvements	1,389
Acres of grazing land with conservation applied to protect/improve the resource	12,691
Acres of conservation applied to protect fish & wildlife habitat	1,665
Financial assistance provided to beginning, limited-resource or socially-disadvantaged farmers	~ 60%
Financial assistance to Caribbean Area producers & landowners	\$4,780,300
Total NRCS CB Budget	\$8 Million
	<i>(Includes financial & technical assistance)</i>

The NRCS Caribbean Area encompasses the Islands of Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands (USVI) and its cays.