



NRCS Caribbean Area Hosts Acting Deputy Chief Jordan



NRCS-CB Director, Edwin Almodóvar; Oeste SWCD President, Jenny Santiago; and NRCS Acting Deputy Chief, Leonard Jordan, inaugurate the first NRCS People's Garden in the Caribbean Area.

The NRCS Caribbean Area (CB) proudly hosted a visit by Acting Deputy Chief, Leonard Jordan, from February 25-28. During the week, Deputy Chief Jordan and NRCS-CB Director, Edwin Almodóvar, visited various sites throughout the Caribbean Area. Their first stop was St. Thomas to meet with EPA to discuss coral reef conservation and NRCS' role in the Caribbean. While there, Mr. Jordan and Director Almodóvar also met with U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Field Supervisor, Edwin Muñiz, and VI Agriculture Com-

missioner, Dr. Louis E. Petersen, Jr., to discuss partnerships to improve agriculture and conserve natural resources in the USVI.

Mr. Jordan then traveled to Puerto Rico, where he viewed the premier of the '*NRCS: Providing Conservation in the Caribbean*' video. Making his way west, Mr. Jordan visited with partners and coffee growers in the Río Loco watershed, and toured conservation implementation sites in Guánica and the Cabo Rojo Salt Flats WRP site. He also joined NRCS-CB staff and 30 businesses at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez Agricultural Sciences Career Fair, where over 150 students viewed our NRCS exhibit and learned about the Pathways program and careers with NRCS. NRCS staff encouraged students to apply for jobs; described how the agency works with farmers, ranchers, communities and individuals to protect natural resources; and showed how to apply for Pathways positions on the USAJobs website.

To highlight Mr. Jordan's trip, NRCS inaugurated our first People's Garden in the Caribbean Area at the Tropical Agriculture Research Station (TARS) in Mayagüez. The Mayagüez People's Garden is a collaborative effort between NRCS, UPR Mayagüez, TARS, the UPR Agricultural Experiment Station, UPR Cooperative Extension Service, UPR Sea Grant, the Oeste Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), Casa Belén, and Mayagüezanos Pro Salud y Ambiente. Project partners donated all the materials and supplies to build this beautiful garden. Compliments to our NRCS Mayagüez Field Office, Ecological Sciences and Soil Sciences Division staff for organizing a wonderful event with our partners and co-workers.

NRCS Caribbean Area Celebrates Black History Month



Rudy G. O'Reilly, Jr., NRCS-CB BEPM, discusses USVI Black History with USDA staff in Ponce.

As part of USDA's **National Black History Month** celebration, the NRCS Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) collaborated with APHIS to celebrate our

Caribbean Area Black History. The event was held at Mercedita Airport in Ponce, PR, on February 27, 2013.

One event highlight was a presentation about Black History in the U.S. Virgin Islands delivered by NRCS Caribbean Area Black Emphasis Program Manager (BEPM), Rudy G. O'Reilly, Jr. Paintings, ethnic music and other Afro-Antillean art were also exhibited, along with artistic appearances.

The following is an excerpt from Mr. O'Reilly's presentation:

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Director's Corner



This time of year is certainly a very unique one. As we look forward to the spring season by planting our gardens, fixing our backyards, or simply dusting off the BBQ grill, we continue adding achievements to our long list of accomplishments. Congrats to all!

During February we participated in many wonderful outreach events: celebrating Black History Month in partnership with APHIS, attending "*5 Días Con Nuestra Tierra*," and participating in the USVI Agriculture Food & Fair. We also inaugurated the first NRCS Caribbean Area People's Garden in Mayagüez, and we hosted our Acting Associate Chief for Conservation, Mr. Leonard Jordan. Many of you had the opportunity to visit with Leonard while we showed him the Caribbean islands, and shared the accomplishments we've had over the past few years with him.

Lastly, congratulations to all the NRCS Caribbean Women on their Women's Heritage Month celebration. You truly are key players on our Caribbean Team!

Yours in Conservation,

Edwin Almodóvar, Director
USDA-NRCS Caribbean Area

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Mayagüez Staff Participate in “5 Días con Nuestra Tierra”



NRCS Mayagüez staff (L-R: Samuel Rios, Mario Rodríguez, Andrés Aponte, Zulma García, Edwin Más, Esperanza Avilés, Manuel Matos & Rolando Collazo) participate in “5 Días con Nuestra Tierra.”

University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez (UPRM) students celebrated the 36th annual “5 Días con Nuestra Tierra” agricultural and educational fair from March 12-16. “5 Días” is visited by people from all over Puerto Rico, making it one of the island’s most important agricultural fairs. NRCS-CB staff from the Mayagüez Field Office (FO), Ecological Sciences and Soils Divisions, the State Office and the CRAC, along with Earth Team Volunteers, participated in this event.

“5 Días” began with a parade of exhibitors marching across the UPRM campus, and

continued with a week of exhibits and presentations from local artisans, farmers, government agencies and musicians.

The NRCS Team presented two exhibits to promote USDA programs and services and ensure that our assistance is accessible to all our customers, with emphasis on reaching beginning, underserved and socially-disadvantaged farmers and landowners.

The first booth, “*Conservation: Our Purpose, Our Passion*,” described the agency’s mission and vision, and promoted our technical services. A broad range of publications were distributed to visitors at this booth.

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Soil Scientist, Manuel Matos (below, center), describes soil profile characteristics to students.



Endangered Plant Species Surveyed on St. Croix



Assessing the environmental threat of a growing head cut from surface erosion in the vicinity of an endangered plant population in St. Croix, USVI.

Ecologists at Geographic Consulting LLC have recently completed a rapid assessment of two federally endangered plant species on St. Croix, USVI. There are three populations of *Buxus vahlii* and a single population of *Catesbaea melanocarpa* in St. Croix. Both plants are also found in Puerto Rico. Formal surveys of these plant populations had never been conducted.

The rapid assessment used highly accurate GPS units to record height and basal stem diameter of individual plants. Their phenology, general health and the presence of seedlings in the understory was also recorded, along with associated plant species and perceived threats. Brian Daley and Jennifer Vali-

ulis concluded that two of the *B. vahlii* populations have more individuals over a greater spatial extent than previously believed. They estimated the *C. melanocarpa* population at 200 individuals rather than the current estimate of 100 individuals. However, the *C. melanocarpa* population was deemed to be at a high risk of wildfire and encroaching agricultural development. Sadly, before the report could be published, a wildfire raced through the center of the *C. melanocarpa* population. This data will help ecologists determine if any plants were lost and how many, or if the fast-moving fire only burned grass.

For a copy of the report, please visit Geographic Consulting’s web site at: www.geographicconsulting.com. Their publications page also contains informative documents on endangered species, threats from invasive species, and the Virgin Islands’ ecology.

Left: *Catesbaea melanocarpa*, Right: *Buxus vahlii*.



NRCS Reaches Out to Students at PUCPR Job Fair

NRCS joined the cadre of companies and agencies promoting career opportunities at the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico (PUCPR)/Puerto Rico Department of Labor Job Fair earlier this month.

Over 100 students visited the NRCS exhibit to learn about our agency’s passion for conservation. NRCS staff explained how the agency works side by side with farmers, ranchers, communities and other individuals and groups to protect natural resources on private land.

NRCS staff described student internship opportunities through the Pathways Program to both students and college graduates. These programs are tailored to recruit, hire, develop, and retain students and recent graduates.

NRCS staff also encouraged students to apply for jobs and internships with NRCS while in college or graduate school. The agency offers internships for degree-seeking undergraduate and graduate students studying agricultural and natural resources related fields such as plant pathology, agronomy, range science, soil science, forestry, ecology, botany, biology, civil and agricultural engineering. Through this program, students can further their education while also learning from NRCS professionals in their fields.

NRCS also presented the Earth Team volunteer program. Earth Team offers exciting opportunities for students seeking unpaid conservation work. Students can fulfill their school’s community service requirements, earn academic credit, serve an unpaid internship, get resume-building work experience or simply help the environment as a volunteer.

NRCS staff attend career fairs nationwide to recruit students. For details on NRCS employment, internship and volunteer opportunities, please contact NRCS Civil Rights Advisory Committee Chair, Mario Rodríguez, at 787-831-3464, x.116 or Mario.rodriguez@pr.usda.gov.



PUCPR students visit with Job Fair exhibitors.

Meet the Corozal Field Office



Corozal Soil Conservationist, Freddie Rivera (right), demonstrates surveying techniques to local students.

The NRCS Corozal Field Office (FO) serves the people of Aibonito, Barranquitas, Bayamón, Comerío, Corozal, Dorado, Naranjito, Orocovi, Toa Alta & Toa Baja, Puerto Rico. They are located at 29 San Ramón St., Suite 2, in Corozal, PR.

The team of Israel Vega (Acting District Conservationist) and Freddie Rivera (Soil Conservationist) provide conservation assistance to the Cibuco and Torrecilla Soil and Water Conservation Districts. They bring a wealth of experience in the specialized areas of soil science, soil microbiology, agricultural waste management, natural resource management, biology, botany, engineering, water and energy conservation and conservation education.

Currently, the NRCS Corozal FO is preparing conservation plans for EQIP program contracts and providing conservation technical assistance (CTA) to help farmers implement planned practices for new crop plantings and pastures. The most frequently requested practices include contour farming, minimum tillage, pasture planting, brush management, hillside ditches and waste management for hog and poultry operations. Call us at 787-859-2880 or visit our office for information or assistance in conserving our natural resources!

NRCS Caribbean Area Celebrates Black History Month

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*"The national theme this year is **At the Crossroads of Freedom and Equality; The Emancipation Proclamation and the March on Washington.** It has been 50 years since Martin Luther King's **I Have a Dream** speech, and 150 years since President Abraham Lincoln signed the **Emancipation Proclamation.**"*

"In the U.S. Virgin Islands, our history is a little different—it has been 165 years since our emancipation on July 3, 1848. That's 15 years earlier than slavery was abolished in the United States. It would be another 30 years, in 1878, when the "Fire Burn" revolt began on St. Croix. This rebellion was led by four women who demanded an end to the unfair labor practices the people of the, then Danish, Virgin Islands experienced since being declared 'Free.' It is interesting to note that only the people of St. Croix were involved in both of these events."

"So, as we march on in 2013 and bring an end to this year's "Black History Month," let us not forget where we come from and how far we have come."

For details on Black History Month, visit www.africanamericanhistorymonth.gov; visit www.pr.nrcs.usda.gov/about/Civil_Rights/index.html for details about the Caribbean Area Civil Rights Advisory Committee.

Mayagüez Staff Participate in "5 Días con Nuestra Tierra"

(Continued from page 2)

The second booth, "**Web Soil Survey and Soil Diversity**," featured the soils of Puerto Rico and the USVI, and displayed profiles of the 10 soil survey orders found on Puerto Rico. Students learned about soil diversity, and were encouraged to construct their own soil mini-profiles using cards with different-colored soil samples. The Team held live Web Soil Survey tutorials to show students how soils information can be retrieved using this interactive tool. NRCS also exhibited current and historic conservation documents and materials at the UPRM Library as part of the "**5 Días**" celebration. For details on NRCS-CB programs and services, please visit www.pr.nrcs.usda.gov.

Organic 101: Strengthening Organic Integrity Through Increased Residue Testing

On January 1, 2013, the USDA National Organic Program (NOP) began a strengthened residue testing program to help increase consumer confidence in the \$32 billion organic industry worldwide. Consumers purchase organic products expecting that they maintain their organic integrity from farm to market, and USDA is committed to meeting these expectations. This program will provide additional verification that organic farmers are following the rules and not using prohibited substances.

USDA organic certifying agents will now test products from at least five percent of the organic farms and businesses that they certify each year. While testing has always been a part of organic product oversight, the new program specifies a minimum amount of testing that must occur.

This testing will help certifying agents identify and take enforcement action against farms and businesses that intentionally use

prohibited substances or methods (prohibited pesticides, antibiotics, synthetic hormones or genetic engineering). Certifying agents can use test results to identify and address instances in which organic products may have unintentionally come in contact with prohibited substances.

The NOP provided certifying agents with resources to help them comply with the new residue testing program. Certifiers test residue when they are concerned that a farm or business has used a prohibited substance or method. Some testing will be random, while other testing will be risk-based. Since there will be wide variety in how organic operations are selected and which tests are conducted, test results will not be used to make broad conclusions about a specific commodity or category of products.

The strengthened testing program also increases confidence in the integrity of USDA organic products among international trade partners. The U.S. currently has trade partnerships with the European Union and Canada, streamlining

trade between three of the largest organic markets in the world. USDA is in discussions to consider similar arrangements with other foreign governments, creating new markets and jobs for organic farmers and businesses.

The new periodic residue testing program will discourage mislabeling and facilitate our oversight of USDA organic products around the world. Periodic residue testing is an important tool to protect the integrity of USDA organic products around the world. To find out more about residue testing and the National Organic Program, visit www.ams.usda.gov/NOP.

Reprinted from the USDA Organic 101 blog series that explores USDA's organic regulations, posted by Miles McEvoy,



Apply Now for Caribbean Area Conservation Innovation Grants



USDA-NRCS is seeking proposals from Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands for the 2013 Conservation Innovation Grants

(CIG). CIG stimulates the development and adoption of innovative conservation approaches and technologies. Applications will be awarded on a competitive basis.

CIG projects are expected to lead to the transfer of conservation technologies, management systems, and innovative approaches into NRCS policy, technical manuals, guides, and references, or to the private sector. CIG does not fund research projects. CIG is used to apply or demonstrate new and or previously proven technology with a new approach. CIG funds projects targeting innovative, on-the-

ground conservation, including pilot projects and field demonstrations.

The Caribbean Area NRCS will have approximately \$120,000 available in FY 2013 to be distributed among the selected projects, and the maximum award amount for any project will not exceed \$30,000. Applications will be accepted from eligible government agencies, non-governmental organizations or individuals for projects between 1 and 3 years in duration. **Applications must be received by NRCS before 4:30 p.m. on April 22, 2013.** NRCS will announce selected proposal applications by June 14, 2013. Late applications will not be considered. For details, please contact Jaime Valentín at 787-766-5206 x121 or Jaime.valentin@pr.usda.gov or visit www.pr.nrcs.usda.gov.

New Videos Highlight Natural Resources

The University of Puerto Rico Sea Grant Program invites the public to view a new video on their YouTube channel called **Buffer Zones in Río Loco Watershed & Guánica Bay.** Learn about the design and implementation of buffer zones as an agricultural practice that also helps conserve our marine and coastal resources. To view the video, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=qO8SM4RosyQ&list=UU83zZurmP8H44OtoKVfpmqA&index=1.

The **Let's Talk About Soil** animated film tells the reality of soil resources around the world, covering the issues of degradation, urbanization, land grabbing and overexploitation; the film offers options to make the way we manage our soils more sustainable. Visit: <http://t.co/uVX15Xe5> to view the film. For details, visit globalsoilweek.org.

NRCS Women Agronomists Receive Recognition



NRCS-CB Eng. Lydia E. Collazo, FWPM; Ileana Curbelo, TC; Dr. Myrna Comas, PR Secretary of Agriculture; and Sonia Burgos-SC at the CAPR Women Agronomists Awards Ceremony.

On March 8, 2013, NRCS female staff participated in Puerto Rico's College of Agronomists (CAPR) annual event to recognize female agronomists working in private industry, academia, and local and federal government agencies. The ceremony was held at La Guardarraya Restaurant in Yauco, PR, as part of the National Women's Celebration Day.

For this event, NRCS nominated two female employees who have Bachelor Degrees in Agronomy and many years of work experience applying agronomic principles in the field. The honorees are Sonia N. Burgos-Colón, Soil Conservationist from Caguas Field Office, and Ileana M. Curbelo-López, Natural Resources Specialist & Toolkit Coordinator from Arecibo Field Office.

Eng. Lydia E. Collazo-De Jesús, Federal Women's Program Manager (FWPM) spoke on behalf of NRCS Director, Agro. Edwin Almodóvar, and presented a recognition plaque to each employee. Ms. Burgos and Ms. Curbelo also had the opportunity to salute and share with Agro. Myrna Comas, PhD, Puerto Rico Secretary of Agriculture. Dr. Comas received a special recognition from the CAPR for being the first female Agronomist appointed to the Puerto Rico Governor's Board.

Activities & Events

- ENTSC Webinar: Integrating Livestock into a Cropping System for Sustainability and Soil Health, April 2, 3:00–4:00 p.m.
- ENTSC Webinar: Climate Change Beliefs, Perceived Risk, and Support for Adaptation and Mitigation among Corn Belt Farmers: Preliminary Survey Results, April 9, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
- ENTSC Webinar: Ecological Site Descriptions as Decision Support Tools for Habitat Restoration, April 16, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
- 2013 St. Croix Eco Fair & Litter Stomp, April 17-18, 9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m., St. George Village Botanical Garden
- Army Earth Day Exposition 2013, April 19, 9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m., Fort Buchanan Community Club, Building 660, Fort Buchanan, PR
- El Yunque Cleanup Day, April 20, registration starts at 7:30 a.m. in the Rain Forest Visitor Center parking lot, El Yunque, PR
- ENTSC Webinar: Cover Crop Mixes: Getting the Cover Crop You Want, April 24, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
- ENTSC Webinar: Exploring the Environmental and Economic Opportunities and Challenges of Cover Crops, May 7, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
- ENTSC Webinar: Outreach: What Social Factors "Sell" Landowners on the Use of Agroforestry Practices?, May 8, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
- ENTSC Webinar: Restoration and Management of Temporary Wetlands, May 21, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
- St. Croix Reef Jam, May 26, 11:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m., Rhythm's at Rainbow Beach, St. Croix
- ENTSC Webinar: Planning and Design of Stream Crossings, May 29, 2:00–3:00 p.m.
- ENTSC Webinar: Orchard Floor Management in Organic Systems, June 4, 3:00–4:00 p.m.
- ENTSC Webinar: Conservation Buffers: Sink or Source Habitats for Fish-Wildlife?, June 11, 2:00–3:00 p.m.

Helping People Help the Land...

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