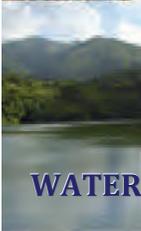




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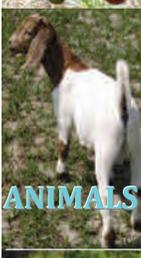
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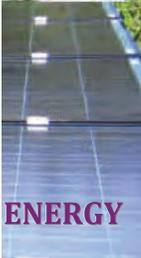
PLANTS



ANIMALS



HUMANS



ENERGY

NRCS Trains Cadre of Future Conservationists, Part 2

Each year, the NRCS Caribbean Area hosts Earth Team student volunteers. Three students are working this summer with the NRCS Caribbean Area Soil Survey Program to complete their bachelor's degree requirements. Each volunteer was asked to describe their experience. Here are their stories:

Gudianne Romero-Méndez is from Camuy. She is a sophomore at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez campus (RUM), working towards a B.S. in Agronomy. Gudianne was selected under the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) to work as a student trainee 8 weeks at the NRCS Utuado Field Office. She enjoyed her experience working with NRCS so much that she intends to finish her degree in Agricultural Science and work for NRCS in the future.



Said Gudianne, "I became familiar with many different conservation practices necessary to improve our natural resources. I learned to use maps, basic GPS (Trimble) techniques to establish field boundaries, and many other field tools. All the knowledge this experience gave me made me realize how to improve our land and natural resources for better environmental benefits. Thank you NRCS for this awesome opportunity!"



Erica M. Claudio is native of Barceloneta, where she currently lives. She is an undergraduate student at RUM with a concentration in Technical Mechanical Agriculture, finishing in December 2012. She plans to earn a Master's degree in Agriculture when she completes her Bachelor's degree. Erica spent six week working at the NRCS Utuado Field Office as part of the Earth Teem volunteer program.

"I consider this experience one of the most valuable opportunities that has helped me to grow professionally and personally. This opportunity led me to seek and learn more about farming and how to help others. I was exposed to field work and many conservation practices to protect our natural resources. I

also became familiar with many instruments and tools to help perform NRCS work," Erica said.

Dayanna I. Estades is an agronomist from Arecibo, who graduated from the University of Puerto Rico, School of Agricultural Science in Mayagüez. She continued her studies and is now working towards a Master's degree. This summer, Dayanna worked with the NRCS Arecibo Field Office as a Soil Conservationist trainee under the STEP program. She is enjoying her experience with the agency and has gained professional experience in the field.



Dayanna said, "This temporary employment has given me a better understanding of the mission and vision the agency has, and I have become familiar with the conservation practices that they implement. I have also been involved in the conservation planning and certification process, working with different systems like Customer Service Toolkit, ProTracts, ArcGIS and others. I have put in to practice many things that I have learned through my years of study and I have acquired experience in areas I never worked before, like engineering and the contracting process. This opportunity has definitely made me grow professionally and will help me reach my goal to work with NRCS and become a member of the team that has the mission of Helping People Help the Land."

For details on the NRCS Earth Team volunteer program, please contact Earth Team Volunteer Coordinator, Hilton Miró, at 787-766-5206 x126 or Hilton.miro@pr.usda.gov.

USDA at 150 Factoid
Happy Hispanic Heritage Month!
More than 24.5 million acres of farmland in the U.S. are operated by Hispanic farmers.



Director's Corner

Greetings Caribbean Area NRCS!

Again, another Fiscal Year went by and we have successfully closed a tough year. Please note that **you** make the difference in making things happen in the Caribbean Area. From funds obligation to conservation implementation, you have done it again, and many thanks for that!

Tough times are ahead of us, but I am glad that we have a strong team here in the Caribbean Area. We have faced many changes as an agency and here in the Caribbean we have seen them first-hand. There are many more changes to come, and I am positive that we will go through another Fiscal Year and will finish it stronger one more time.

Yours in Conservation,

Edwin Almodóvar, Director
USDA-NRCS Caribbean Area

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NRCS-CB Field Staff Receive Integrated Pest Management Training



NRCS-PR staff participating in Integrated Pest Management (IPM) technical training workshop.

On August 29 & September 19, 2012, 32 NRCS employees received training in the new Integrated Pest Management Code 595 practice. The training was conducted at the Agricultural Research Service (TARS) conference room in Mayagüez and the St. Croix, USVI Field Office. This conservation practice has been revised and the planning and reporting processes have change substantially. The training was part of the NRCS Ecological Sciences Division Business Plan for FY 2012.

The presentations were made by Carlos E. Morganti NRCS Conservation Agronomist for the Caribbean Area, Agronomists José Ramos, Ada Alvarado and Dr. Hipólito O'Farrill from the Agricultural Extension Service in May-

agüez. The planning and implementation of the IPM practice was presented following the Agronomy Technical Note # 5 directives and online with the NRCS Policy for Integrated Pest Management.

In PR, Extension Service staff delivered three presentations on the latest IPM techniques recommended by the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. For more information on IPM, please contact Carlos Morganti at carlos.morganti@pr.usda.gov or 787-831-3416 x105.



Dr. Hipólito O'Farrill from UPR Agricultural Extension Service, Mayagüez, discussing IPM with NRCS staff.

Suroeste Soil & Water Conservation District Featured in Southeast Conservation District Employees Association Newsletter

Puerto Rico's Suroeste (Southwest) Soil & Water Conservation District was featured in the September 2012 issue of the Southeast Conservation District Employees Association newsletter, "The Fencepost." Excerpted below are the text and photos published in the article.



The Southwest SWCD is active in developing conservation practices to improve soil and water resources, erosion control and to acquire more knowledge on farmer's needs.

Upon a very strong initiative by members of the Board, the Río Loco 2010 Project started with funds from USDA-NRCS and the PR Department of Agriculture. The project will improve the quality and quantity of agricultural resources through construction, installation and establishment of practices to control the



effect of negative external agents that reduce agricultural production and harm the coral reefs in Guánica Bay.

Our team is composed of volunteer farmers with leadership and commitment to our natural resources. Pictured left to right (above) are Carlos González, Treasurer; Pedro Ramírez, Supervisor; José B. Ramírez, Secretary; Edwin Almodóvar, NRCS-CB Director; Jaime Acevedo, President; Michael Mc Gee and Mara Semidey, Supervisors; and Isela Ortiz, Administrator. Solar Energy 2000 are our engineering partners. For more information, contact Suroeste SWCD at 939-272-1148.

EPA Awards Grant to Community Group to Educate People about the Martín Peña Canal

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awarded a \$60,000 grant to ENLACE, a community-based organization serving communities along the Martín Peña Canal in San Juan, Puerto Rico. ENLACE will use the grant to educate people about water quality in the canal and how to reduce pollution. The funding is part of EPA's Urban Waters program, which supports community efforts to restore, revitalize and provide access to local waterways.

ENLACE's mission is to rehabilitate the Martín Peña Canal and its bordering communities by building partnerships between the communities and the public and private sectors.

"The pollution problems that plague Caño Martín Peña are staggering," said EPA Regional Administrator Judith A. Enck. "People living in this community deserve clean water and involving the public in restoring this resource will help ensure this water body is eventually cleaned up."

ENLACE will produce water quality programs for 2,000 school children and adults in the densely populated neighborhoods near the canal. Activities for younger children will include field days and contests, while older children will learn about water quality monitoring and public health. Adults will participate in public meetings and workshops, develop signs related to contamination, and carry out waste reduction and recycling activities.

Many urban waterways have been polluted for years by sewage, road runoff and contamination from abandoned industrial facilities. Healthy and accessible urban waters can help local businesses grow and enhance educational, recreational, employment and economic opportunities in nearby communities. By promoting public access to urban waters, EPA is helping communities become active participants in restoration and protection.

The EPA Urban Waters program is awarding \$30,000 - \$60,000 grants to 46 organizations nationwide. The selected projects will promote urban water restoration through community engagement and outreach, water quality monitoring and studies, and environmental education and training. For details on EPA's Urban Waters program, visit: www.epa.gov/urbanwaters/index.html.

Meet the San Sebastián Field Office



San Sebastián Field Office staff (left to right): Javier Torres, Soil Conservationist; Jennifer Ramos, student intern; Jorge Ruiz, Soil Conservationist; Elizabeth Fred, District Conservationist; Ramón González, ACES; and Michelle Catoni, Soil Conservation Technician..

The NRCS San Sebastián Field Office (FO) serves the people of Aguada, Aguadilla, Isabela, Lares, Moca, Quebradillas, Rincón and San Sebastián, Puerto Rico. They are located at 4598 Arcadio Estrada Ave., Suite 9, in San Sebastian, PR.

The San Sebastián FO staff consists of Elizabeth Fred (District Conservationist), Jorge Ruiz (Soil Conservationist), Javier Torres (Soil Conservationist), Michelle Catoni (Soil Conservation Technician), and Ramón González (ACES), who provide conservation assistance to the Culebri-

nas and Noroeste Soil and Water Conservation Districts. They bring a wealth of experience in the specialized areas of soil science, agricultural waste management systems, natural resources management, and conservation education, providing technical assistance to farmers on conservation plans that ensure the good management of the natural resources on their farms.

This summer, the San Sebastián FO hosted Eddie Morales, a summer intern from UPR-RUM, and is currently hosting Jennifer Ramos, an Environmental Technology fall semester intern from UPR-Aguadilla.

Currently, the NRCS San Sebastián FO is providing technical assistance on conservation practices, EQIP, Dairy Energy Initiative, Waste Management Systems, CSP and a Special Project in the Coloso Valley in Aguada, PR.

Call us at 787-896-3565/2987 or visit our office for more information or assistance in conserving our natural resources!

NRCS-CB Staff on the Move!



It is with mixed emotions that NRCS-CB staff say "Goodbye" to our Toolkit Coordinator, Edgar Díaz, after 33 ½ years of service to NRCS! While we wish him much happiness in his retirement, we will miss Edgar's helpfulness and wit.



Last month, Ileana Curbelo, former District Conservationist at the Corozal Field Office, was reassigned to be Toolkit Coordinator (Natural

Resource Specialist) at the Arecibo Field Office. Also, Sonia Burgos, Soil Conservationist at the Arecibo field office was reassigned to the Caguas field office. Congratulations to both employees on their new positions!



USDA at 150 Factoid

The 2008 Organic Production Survey counted 14,540 organic farms and ranches in the United States—4.1 million acres of land. Of those farms, 10,903 were USDA certified and 3,637 were exempt from certification.

Organic 101: Organic Certification Cost-Share Programs

Annual organic certification fees allow certifiers to carry out their responsibilities. These fees vary according to an operation's size and other variables. The USDA organic cost share programs help to ensure that these costs don't discourage those wanting to get organic certification. The programs make certification more affordable by reimbursing producers and handlers for up to 75% of their certification costs (maximum \$750/year). Eligible costs include application fees, inspection fees, travel for certification inspectors, and postage.

"After I figured out how to apply, I found it to be easy," said Gary Philbrick of Philbrick Farms, a Paso Robles, CA, organization that is certified to produce walnuts. *"I just save my receipts and fill out the necessary form and send it in [to the state]."*

State governments administer the organic cost-share funds, appropriated by Congress under the 2008 Farm Bill. State governments, usually Departments of Agriculture, work with USDA to administer the program and distribute funds to growers, ranchers, and handlers that are currently certified under USDA organic regulations.

Applicants submit a short form, proof of certification, and an itemized invoice to their state agency. The state verifies the applications before paying eligible organic operations. The program is not competitive, so anyone who is eligible may apply for reimbursement.

"I'm a small farmer, and this program helps me a lot," said Nancy Abramson of Rooster Ridge Farm, a 20-acre operation that devotes one-fifth of its acreage to growing everything from organic citrus to flowers to herbs. *"In the beginning, I had a huge fee [getting certified], but the cost share gave me two-thirds of it back. The paperwork is nothing. I think the program is fantastic, and it makes organic farming very affordable for small farmers."*

When it comes to organic certification, there are many things small growers or handlers have to consider. Affordability is important and often at the top of the list. Organic certification not only fulfills a desired method of farming, but also meets increased consumer demand for food that is farmed and handled organically.

"It's a huge benefit for me that I can advertise that I'm certified organic," said Abramson. *"There's such a marketing plus, and it gets [my*



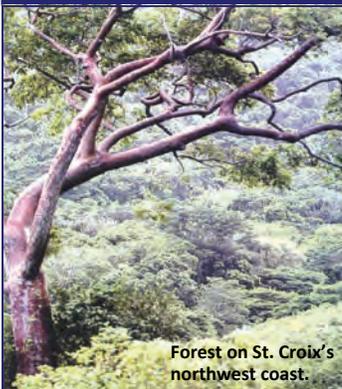
product] into grocery stores that require me to be organic."

In addition to stocking grocery stores, Abramson takes pride in being able to market her products as organic when selling to consumers at the local farmers market and to the restaurants near her Santa Cruz operation. They all appreciate her organic spinach.

The organic cost share program is one of many programs USDA offers to support emerging, transitioning, or current organic growers and handlers. Visit the National Organic Program site at www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/nop for information about all things organic.

Reprinted from the USDA Organic 101 blog series that explores USDA's organic regulations.

V.I. Department of Agriculture Conserves Forest for Future Park



The V.I. Department of Agriculture (VIDOA) bought a parcel of forested land in the northwest corner of St. Croix on July 27

with the hope that it may someday become part of a **Maroon Ridge Territorial Park** that would celebrate the story of the escaped slaves who built a community there.

The approximately 70-acre parcel is the second piece of land purchased in the area by VIDOA this year. A 6.5-acre parcel was purchased on May 4 nearby, though the two pieces of land do not touch. Both are located in the heavily forested area between Creque Dam Road and Scenic Road.

Marilyn Chakroff, VIDOA Forest Stewardship Program Coordinator, said the purchases were a long time in the making. The land was bought with grants from the USDA Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, which funds 75% of the purchase price for forests they find to have special ecological, recreational or community value. The Nature Conservancy provided the remaining 25% in the form of a land donation.

VIDOA first enrolled in the program in 2001, and conducted a study to identify forests that would qualify. The Maroon Ridge area was

ranked top priority for conservation because of its role in St. Croix's history. *"It doesn't just have ecological value; it also has cultural and historic value,"* Chakroff said.

The Coral Bay watershed on St. John is also approved for the program, though no land has been purchased yet at that location.

VIDOA received roughly \$3 million in program grants in 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2010, though until recently they were unable to spend the money on land purchases. Chakroff explained that since they are federal funds, strings are attached. The most difficult is the condition that VIDOA can only offer to pay what the land is appraised for, which is often lower than the asking price. *"We've been through the process several times and had the owners say 'no' when we got to the final verdict,"* Chakroff said.

Chakroff plans to continue purchasing land in the area in hopes of one day connecting the parcels into a territorial park, something cultural tourism and local history supporters have long desired. One large hurdle stands in the way of this dream, however—the USVI does not have a territorial park service.

Chakroff is not deterred by this. She is optimistic that such a service will be funded in the not too distant future, spurred on in part by the rising importance of cultural tourism on St. Croix and the possibility of the island being declared a national heritage area. *"I'm willing for Agriculture to be holding onto the property and monitoring it until such time as we do have a park service at which point these (parcels) would become part of that,"* she said.

As a condition of the purchase, the new VI-

DOA land is open to the public. Chakroff says her agency is still debating how the land will be used, but she believes it will be restricted to low-impact activities, such as hiking, nature tours and bird watching. She doesn't believe ATV's or horses will be allowed due to erosion concerns. Visit: www.vifresh.com/forestry or call 340-778-0997 for details.

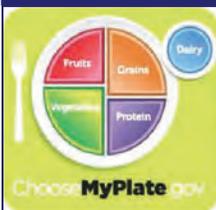


Nilda González (right), NRCS Food Drive Coordinator, and Alberto Morales (left), FNS Food Drive Coordinator, giving the food to José Bergollo from El Banco de Alimentos. Luis García (not shown) was Alternate Coordinator. NRCS employees donated 751 pounds of food. NRCS Food Drive Campaign Leader, Edwin Almodóvar, NRCS-CB Director (not shown), expressed his gratitude to NRCS employees.

Activities & Events

- **IITF Ecotourism Planning Model for Luquillo & the Northeast Ecological Corridor Seminar, October 3, 2012, 2:30—3:30 p.m., IITF Conference Room, Jardín Botánico Sur, Río Piedras.**
- **ENTSC Community Supported Agriculture Webinar, October 9, 2012, 3:00-4:00 p.m.**
- **Yuca Festival, October 19-21, 2012, Plaza de los Festivales, Isabela, PR.**
- **National Plantain Festival, October 20-21, 2012, Plaza de Recreo, Corozal, PR.**
- **14th Caribbean Urban & Community Forestry Conference, October 25-26, 2012, UVI Administration Building, St. Thomas, USVI.**
- **ENTSC Conservation Tree/Shrub Suitability Groups: A Tool for Matching Woody Plants to Soils Webinar, October 31, 2012, 2:00-3:00 p.m.**
- **St. Thomas—St. John Agriculture & Food Fair, November 3-4, 2012, UVI Reichhold Center Grounds, St. Thomas, USVI.**
- **ENTSC Manure to Energy: Thermal Conversion (Combustion, Gasification, Pyrolysis) of Animal Manures and Biomass Webinar, November 28, 2012, 2:00-3:00 p.m.**
- **ENTSC Organic No-Till Systems Webinar, December 11, 2012, 3:00-4:00 p.m.**

Use USDA's SuperTracker to Get Your Plate into Shape!



Use USDA's electronic tool—ChooseMyPlate.gov—to plan healthful meals, track how well you are meeting personal goals, track physical activity and get help from a virtual coach!

- Get your personalized nutrition and physical activity plan.
- Track your foods & physical activities to see how they stack up.
- Get tips & support to help you make healthier choices and plan ahead.

Helping People Help the Land...

USDA-NRCS Caribbean Area

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