



Caribbean Area NRCS December 2013 Newsletter

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service sent this bulletin at 01/14/2014 07:50 AM EST



Director's Corner

Without a doubt, this year was full of surprises, losses and gains. As the year comes to an end, I hope that you accomplished all your 2013 resolutions.

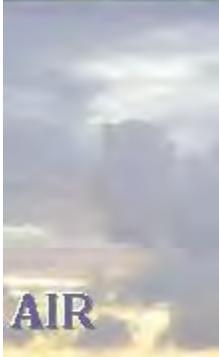
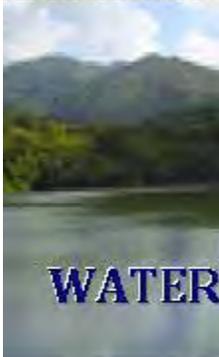
I wish that this New Year brings each and everyone of you many good things and blessings. No matter what your 2014 resolutions are, please keep our beautiful Natural Resources in mind.

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*Yours in
Conservation,*

*Edwin Almodóvar,
NRCS Caribbean
Area Director*



Recognition for La Fortaleza People's Garden



On December 16, 2013, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) recognized First Lady Wilma Pastrana Jiménez and her home garden at La Fortaleza officially as a **People's Garden** – joining the list of People's Gardens across the United States and the Caribbean.

This prestigious recognition is the first to be granted to a Puerto Rico state government facility, and is the third established on the island (the first two People's Gardens are located at the Mayagüez Field Office on the USDA Tropical Agriculture Research Station grounds, and at the Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport).

USDA-NRCS Caribbean Area Director, Edwin Almodóvar, presented the award to the First Lady, along with Puerto Rico Secretary of Agriculture, Dr. Myrna Comas, and Dr. Gladys González, Dean of Campus at the Mayagüez College of Agricultural Sciences. To learn more about People's Gardens in the Caribbean Area, visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/pr/about/outreach/?cid=nrcs141p2_037312.

Promoting NRCS Careers at the University of Puerto Rico – Mayagüez Job Fair



Caribbean Area NRCS personnel interacted with over 130 students at the **University of Puerto Rico - Mayagüez (UPRM) 25th Annual Job Fair**, held Friday, September 27, 2013 at the UPR Rafael A. Mangual Coliseum. NRCS staff provided career, employment and internship information to participating

UPRM students, along with other prestigious, well-known companies and government agencies from Puerto Rico and the continental United States.



Every year, thousands of students visit the UPRM Career Fair, and hundreds of them have the opportunity to speak with NRCS State Conservationists and personnel. This activity is a great opportunity for NRCS to promote Conservation Careers and opportunities through the Pathways internship and fellowship program. Students visiting the NRCS booth viewed presentations and live demonstrations on how search and apply for Federal jobs on www.usajobs.gov.

During the week, agency personnel also participated in other UPRM recruitment activities associated with the Job Fair, including the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) "Companies Night" on September 25th. During this event, the NRCS team met with UPRM engineering students seeking career and internship opportunities with the Federal government and the private sector.



The University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez (UPRM) is a Land-Grant College that registers the best students from public and private schools. Students enrolled at UPRM are seeking degrees in Agricultural Sciences, Arts & Sciences, Business Administration and Engineering. The NRCS team participation was a collaborative effort between the Civil Right Advisory Committee, Mayaguez Field Office, MLRA Soils Division, Ecological Science Division and the State Office.

Upcoming Activities

January 3, 2014 & Every Friday Morning: San Sebastian Farmer's Market, Agropecuaria Plaza.

January 13, 2014: Civil Rights Advisory Committee Meeting, NRCS State Office, San Juan.

January 14, 2014: DC Meeting, NRCS State Office, San Juan, to discuss EQIP & KPM 2014.

February 6, 2014: DC Meeting, NRCS

For more information, contact [Mario Rodríguez](mailto:Mario.Rodriguez@aphis.usda.gov) at 787-831-3454 x.116 or visit [Pathways Internship & Fellowship Programs](#) or [My NRCS Careers](#).

NRCS Helps Install Rain Garden on UPR Río Piedras Campus



State Office, San Juan, to discuss the new Toolkit & EQIP 2014.

February 15-17, 2014: St. Croix Annual Agri-Fest, Ag Fair Grounds, USVI.

February 18, 2014: National Cover Crops & Soil Health Forum Live Downlink, NRCS State Office Conference Room, San Juan; NRCS Conference Room, Mayagüez Field Office; and USDA Service Center Conference Room, St. Croix.

March 6, 2014: DC Meeting, NRCS State Office, San Juan, to discuss EQIP & KPM 2014.

The rain garden crew celebrates the completion of the UPR Rain Garden Project! From left to right: Amanda (Valeria's Sister), Valeria López (Student), Mr. Urrutia (UPR laborer), Frances Vera (Student), Mr. Raymond (UPR laborer), Eng. Lydia E. Collazo-NRCS, Agro. Wilfredo Febres-UPR, Bianca Morales (Student), Mr. Félix (UPR Digger Operator), Luis Lagares (Student) and Mr. Angel (UPR's Labor). Also worked but not shown in this picture: Mr. Rafael Lagares (Luis' Father) and Deane Martínez (Bianca's Friend).

As part of their Conservation Course (CIBI-3007), students at the University of Puerto Rico's Río Piedras Campus needed to establish a project within the campus that helps the environment by promoting natural resource conservation. The class decided to establish a **rain garden**, with the assistance of the NRCS Caguas Field Office (FO). The University provided construction materials, heavy equipment, all permits and laborers. UPR students worked with the planning process, project proposal and coordination and volunteered to assist with rain garden installation on the construction day. Agronomist Edwin Más, NRCS Plant Materials Specialist, provided the class with recommendations on the plants to be used in the rain garden, and reviewed UPR's proposed planting plan. The installation was completed in **one day** (7:00 AM – 4:30 PM) and was an **"Accident Free"** collaborative effort! For details, please contact [Lydia Collazo](#) at 787-743-2743 x.112.



Photos from left to right: 1-Valeria López, student; Frances Vera, student; Agronomist Wilfredo Febres, UPR; Professor Claribel Cabán, CIBI 3007; Bianca Morales, student; Engineer Lydia E. Collazo, NRCS; and Luis Lagares, student. 2-Students remove and save the vegetative cover (sod). 3-Engineer Carol Rivera (black shirt) visited the site to inspect the work.



A backhoe, loader and bobcat (heavy equipment) were used to excavate the rain garden and construct the berm. The berm was covered with sod (natural grass mats) to control erosion.



A six-inch layer of “amended soil mix” was spread on the base of the rain garden. The mix consisted of 50% sand, 30% compost (mulch) and 20% topsoil. UPR laborers and students finished spreading the amended soil mix. They also distributed the plant materials across the planting area following a design created by Ana Corujo, a UPR Landscape Architect Student.



The planting zones were marked with flags for the students to plant. UPR’s laborers planted the palm trees and the “mani” grass cover. The last part of the project was distributing a two-inch layer of mulch (organic material).

NRCS in Action at the First North Business Summit INTENOR



On November 1, 2013, NRCS staff participated in the **1st North Business Summit INTENOR**, which encourages business development by providing valuable practices and information to achieve sustainable business success in the face of economic

crisis. The summit was held at the Caribe Hilton Hotel in San Juan, PR, along with the Third Forum of Regionalization. It was attended by people from all over Puerto Rico including farmers, students, politicians, representatives, senators, mayors, and the President and Provost of Sistema Ana G. Méndez.

The NRCS team of Vivian Vera, Soil Conservation Technician from Caguas Field Office, and Luis Garcia, Support Services Specialist from the State Office; presented an exhibit to promote USDA-NRCS programs and services, and ensure that our assistance is accessible to all our customers. Rafael Sierra, Hispanic Emphasis Program Manager and Soil Conservationist from the Corozal Field Office, presented information to the Innovation Technology panel about NRCS programs and services, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), On-Farm Energy Initiative (NOFEI), and Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG).



Our participation in the summit was crucial because it allowed us to share our programs and stress their importance with the community about how NRCS helps farmers to start new businesses, create high quality products and conserve natural resources. We thank Professor Magda Rodriguez, INTENOR Public Relations, for her invitation and support through the entire First North Business Summit. For more information, contact [Rafael Sierra Castro](#) at 787-859-2880 x.112.

Mayagüez Boy Scout Outreach



This summer, an NRCS team of employees from the Mayagüez Field, Ecological Sciences and Soils offices provided technical assistance to help Mayagüez Boy Scout Troop 55 with a conservation project. The NRCS team helped Scout Daniel Sepúlveda Alemán to stabilize an

area of the Chapel El Cristo de Los Milagros in Mayagüez. His Eagle Scout Project reforested and stabilized a landslide-prone hillside in the chapel by planting Pacholí (Vetiver) grass to control erosion and conserve soil and installing vegetative barriers and tree planting conservation practices.

The following education activities were conducted with the Troop 55 scouts by the TEAM:

a) A training on how to use a clinometer to layout the Pacholí barriers led by Plant



Materials Specialist, Edwin Más, and Soil Conservationist, Esperanza Avilés.



b) A site visit to a farm in San Germán where Resource Conservationist, Raquéel Robledo, taught the handling of Pacholí seeds. Scouts had the opportunity to identify the Pacholí grass, harvest it and prepare it for re-planting.

c) Soil Scientist, Samuel Ríos, taught the benefits soil identification using the Web Soil Survey and distributed a factsheet describing the tool.

d) The team of Edwin Más, Samuel Ríos, Volunteer, Carlos Pérez, and Esperanza Avilés led a field demonstration of laying out and establishing the vegetative barrier.

As a result of this conservation project, a vegetative barrier of Pacholí grass and new trees were laid out and established by the scouts of Troop 55. For more information, contact Plant Materials Specialist, [Edwin Más](#), at 787-831-3416 x.106.

NRCS Assists MA Student Project Plan for USFS El Yunque National Forest



Worcester Polytech project team students (left to right): Tom Harless (Chemical Engineering), Lindsey Wilson (Chemical Engineering), Andrea Caprio (Civil Engineering), Rachel Hesse (Biomedical Engineering), Greg Kornichuk (Civil Engineering).

Last fall, the U. S. Forest Service sponsored five students from the Worcester (Massachusetts) Polytechnic Institute to create an agroforestry project proposal for Puerto Rico's **El Yunque National Forest**. On November 14, 2013, Pedro Ríos, Ecosystem Management and Planning Team Leader at the El Yunque National Forest, and the students (Thomas Harless, Greg Kornichuck, Andrea Caprio, Lindsey Wilson, and Rachel Hesse) visited the Caribbean Area State Office seeking soil and conservation practice information for their proposal. State Soil Scientist, Carmen Santiago, discussed the objectives and needs of the students' proposal with them, and explained how to use the Web Soil Survey. She showed them how to locate their area of interest, and how to access the soil data and soil interpretations reports available for project evaluation. During their visit, Ms. Santiago also detailed the importance of properly managing the soils in the area, and discussed the potential crops, conservation practices and markets available.

The students also visited the Rio Piedras Botanical Gardens with Plant Materials Specialist, Edwin Más, on December 3, 2013, accompanied by their Advisor Professors, Hugh Lauer and Stanley Selkow. Mr. Más delivered a powerpoint presentation describing conservation practices that could be used on an Agroforestry project, and showed them how to use a rustic "A" level, or basic engineering hand level, to trace contour lines, hillside ditches or terraces in the field. He also recommended various potential crops to be used in agroforestry, such as exotic fruits, flowers and vegetables.

As partial fulfillment of their requirements for their Bachelor of Science, the Worcester Polytechnic Institute students prepared a written report and delivered an oral presentation entitled: "**Creating an Agroforestry Based Economic Sector in a Tropical Rainforest.**" The presentation took place at the El Yunque National Forest conference room for over 15 participants, including those who assisted them with their proposal from the USDA Forest Service and NRCS Caribbean Area.

USDA Awards Projects to Improve Farm & Rural Business Energy Efficiency in the Caribbean Area

On November 8, 2013, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced funding of 424 projects across the country to help agricultural producers and rural small businesses reduce their energy consumption and costs, and use renewable energy technologies in their operations.

"Today's Rural Energy for America Program announcements will provide further assistance for agricultural producers and rural small business owners to save energy, promote renewable energy creation, and boost the bottom line for their operation," Vilsack said. *"By investing in renewable energy created in rural America, USDA is able to provide new income opportunities in our small towns while supporting the Obama Administration's comprehensive effort to combat the impacts of a changing climate."*

The Rural Energy for America Program offers financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and rural small businesses to purchase and install renewable energy systems and improve energy-efficiency. Vilsack announced more than \$14 million in grants and loan guarantees to business owners in 22 states, the Western Pacific, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Up to 25 percent of an eligible renewable energy system or energy efficiency improvement project can be funded through a REAP grant, and additional support can be provided through loan guarantees. Since the start of the Obama Administration, REAP has helped fund more than 8,250 renewable energy and energy efficiency projects nationwide. For more information, please visit www.rurdev.usda.gov/BCP_REAP.html.

USDA Announces Funding to Improve Rural Housing in Puerto Rico

On November 12, 2013, Secretary Vilsack announced grant awards to recipients in 45 states, the Western Pacific and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to make housing repairs and improve housing conditions for limited-income rural residents. In Puerto Rico funds were awarded to Yabucoa Municipality (\$46,342), Guayama Municipality

(\$46,320), and Guayanilla Municipality (\$46,320). Acting Under-Secretary for Rural Development, Doug O'Brien, announced the selections.

"Providing safe, reliable housing to rural residents is key to maintaining stable communities and creating jobs," O'Brien said. "USDA has developed strategic partnerships with Tribes, community organizations and non-profit groups to improve the living conditions for thousands of rural residents."

Funding is provided through USDA Rural Development's Housing Preservation Grant program. Funds are awarded to intermediaries such as local governments, public agencies, federally-recognized Indian Tribes, and non-profit, faith-based and community organizations. These organizations then distribute the grants to homeowners and owners of multi-family rental properties or cooperative dwellings who rent to low- and very-low-income residents. USDA does not provide funds directly to eligible homeowners. Grants may be used to make general repairs, such as installing or improving plumbing, or providing or enhancing access to people with disabilities. Funds may also be used to make homes more energy efficient. For details, visit www.rurdev.usda.gov/LP_Subject_HousingAndCommunityAssistance.html.

USDA Announces Electric System Improvements in 25 States & the USVI

On December 13, 2013, Secretary Vilsack announced more than \$1.8 billion in funding for electric utility infrastructure projects in 25 states and one territory to improve service for more than 37,000 rural customers through USDA's Rural Utilities Service Program. The projects include more than \$45 million for smart grid technology, \$73 million for renewable energy projects and over \$213 million targeted to benefit Native Americans. This funding will build or improve more than 6,500 miles of line to deliver electricity to rural America. In the Caribbean Area, the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority was awarded \$13,000,000 to implement smart grid projects.

"Rural electric cooperatives have provided reliable, affordable power to rural communities for more than 75 years. Today's investments will help ensure our electric infrastructure continues to deliver reliable and affordable electricity for years to come," Vilsack said. "This funding is part of the Obama Administration's vision for a new rural energy economy and USDA's commitment to creating economic opportunity in rural America. Investments in smart grid technologies will continue to modernize our nation's electric system and improve operational efficiencies." For more information, please visit www.rurdev.usda.gov/UEP_Loans_Grants.html.

NRCS-ENTSC 2014 Webinar Schedules



Understanding Organic & Sustainable Agriculture

2014 WEBINARS

In partnership with Oregon Tilth, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's East and West National Technology Support Centers are pleased to present "Understanding Organic and Sustainable Agriculture" webinars in 2014.



Information needed to participate is available at the Science and Technology Training Library at ConservationWebinars.net about 30 days prior to the scheduled presentation date. Start time for the webinars is 3pm Eastern / 12pm Pacific. The webinars are open to the public, and they will be archived. [Subscribe](#) for our webinar announcements.

2014	Organic and Sustainable Agriculture Webinar Topics
Feb 04	Insights from an Organic Certifier
Apr 15	On-Farm Food Safety and Conservation
Jun 03	Commonly Used Organic Inputs
Aug 05	Weed Management in Organic Pastures
Oct 07	Organic Farming and Soil Health
Dec 02	Nutrient Budgeting: Organic Considerations for Implementing Conservation Practice Standard 590



The USDA NRCS East National Technology Support Center is pleased to offer the following webinar topics in 2014.

- Start time for these webinars is 2pm Eastern / 11am Pacific.
- Information needed to participate is available at the Science and Technology Training Library at ConservationWebinars.net about 30 days prior to the scheduled presentation date.
- The webinars are open to the public, and they will be archived.
- [Subscribe](#) for our webinar announcements.

2014	Webinar Topics
Jan 29	Addressing Resource Concerns: Evaluating, Documenting, and Reporting Progress using NRCS' New Land Use Planning Criteria
Feb 26	Overview and Recent Updates of Engineering Field Tools
Mar 26	Wetland Restoration Hydrology and Design Overview
Apr 30	Writing a Seeding Plan for Conservation Practices: Critical Areas, Natives and More
May 28	Effectiveness of Herbaceous Weed Control Methods/Techniques on Forest Invasives
Jun 25	Forage Mixes and Cover Crops for Grazing Management
Jul 30	Planning Considerations for Confined and Other Animal Feeding Operations
Aug 27	Solar-powered Water Systems for Grazing Operations
Sep 24	Basic Pump and Pipeline Design
Oct 29	Planning and Design of Stream Crossings
Nov 19	Fencing for Livestock and Improved Pasture Management



HEALTHY SOILS WEBINAR SERIES 

unlock the SECRETS IN THE SOIL

The National Soil Health and Sustainability Team, located at the USDA NRCS East National Technology Support Center, is pleased to offer the following soil health webinars in 2014. Start time for our soil health webinars is 2pm Eastern / 11am Pacific. The webinars will be announced at the [Science and Technology Training Library](#).

2014	Soil Health Webinar Topic
Jan 16	An Experimental Case Study for Soil Health
Feb 11	The Biology of Soil Compaction
Mar 11	Soil Health and Production Benefits of Mob Grazing
Apr 08	Managing for Soil Health on Dryland - A Farmer's Perspective
May 13	Using RUSLE2 to Evaluate Soil Health Planning Principles
Jun 10	Managing for Soil Health in the Piedmont Area of the Southeast - A Farmer's Perspective
Jul 08	Managing for Soil Health when Raising Potatoes - A Farmer's Perspective
Aug 12	Managing for Soil Health on an Organic Farm - A Farmer's Perspective

U.S. EPA Seeking Nominations for 2014 Environmental Quality Awards

Each year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency honors individuals, businesses and organizations that have contributed significantly to improving the environment and protecting public health in New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and eight federally recognized Indian Nations. The period for the awards is 2013. [EPA is now seeking nominations](#) for this annual award. Winners will be honored at an awards ceremony in April 2014. Each winner will be recognized for his or her environmental achievement at a ceremony during Earth Week. **The Agency is accepting nominations for its Environmental Quality Awards until February 18, 2014.**

The awards recognize achievement in six categories:

- Individuals
- Business and Industry
- Non-Profit Organization, Environmental or Community Group
- Environmental Education
- Federal, State, Local or Tribal Government or Agency
- Press and Media

For award criteria, prior winners and nomination instructions, visit EPA's Environmental Quality Award webpage at www.epa.gov/region2/eqa. For details, please contact [Chris Sebastian](#) at 212-637-3597.

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