



July 2011

The Caribbean

Volume 1, Issue 1



Welcome to the New NRCS Newsletter!



Greetings from the Caribbean!

I would like to welcome you to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Caribbean Area newsletter. In this newsletter, you will find information about NRCS programs and services, as well as information about our partnership efforts and projects we are working on together.

As your new State Conservationist for the Caribbean Area, it is my goal to continue providing the best financial and technical assistance available to landowners in order to implement conservation on our beautiful land and to continue working together, in partnership, **Helping People Help the Land**. We hope that you find this newsletter user-

friendly and informative.

Our NRCS team looks forward to working closely with you to conserve and maintain the Caribbean's beautiful and precious natural resources. We welcome you to take the time to see what we are doing to conserve our resources in the Caribbean, and to also let us know how we can be of better service to our community. Should you have any concerns and/or questions, please e-mail me at edwin.almodovar@pr.usda.gov or contact us at any of the USDA-NRCS Service Centers throughout the Caribbean Area.

We look forward to continuing to provide the best technical assistance and services to you, as we work together to **Help the Land in the Caribbean**.

Sincerely,

Edwin Almodóvar
State Conservationist
NRCS Caribbean Area

NRCS & Milk Industry Development Fund to Help Puerto Rico Dairy Farmers Save Money & Energy



Holsteins are udderly delighted about saving money & energy!

The NRCS Caribbean Area State Office, in partnership with the Milk Industry Development Fund (MIDF), is pleased to announce the launching of a new initiative designed to help agricultural producers transition to

more energy efficient operations. The initiative will make funding available for individual on-farm energy audits designed to save farmers both money and energy. *"This is a great opportunity for the dairy farmers in the Caribbean Area,"* said NRCS Caribbean Area Director, Edwin Almodóvar. *"With these Agricultural Energy Management Plans, dairy farmers will be making better decisions. We are glad for this opportunity to partner with the MIDF, MIRO, PR Dept of Agriculture and EnSave."*

The energy audits will be individually tailored

to ensure coverage of each farm's primary energy uses such as milk cooling, irrigation pumping, heating and cooling of livestock production facilities, manure collection and transfer, grain drying, and similar common on-farm activities.

NRCS and MIDF are working together to implement the program. Fifty (50) eligible farmers have been selected to participate in the program. Through certified Technical Service Provider (TSP), EnSave, Inc., Agricultural Energy Management Plans (AgEMPs)

Continued on p. 2

Activities & Events	
●	Director's Advisory & Improvement Team Meeting, August 18, 2011, 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m., Caguas Field Office
●	MRBI Drainage Water Management Awareness Webinar, August 18, 2011, 2:00 - 3:30 p.m. (https://nrcs.sc.egov.usda.gov/st/ntsc_training/default.aspx)
●	MRBI In-Season Nitrogen Management Tools Webinar, August 24, 2011, 2:00 - 3:30 p.m.
●	Civil Rights Advisory Committee Meeting, August 24, 2011
●	140th Caribbean Fisheries Management Council Meeting, August 30-31, 2011, Suite 1108, 268 Muñoz Rivera Ave., San Juan, PR
●	NTSC Stream Crossings for Livestock & Equipment Webinar, August 31, 2011, 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.
●	NTSC Organic Grain Production Webinar, September 13, 2011, 2:00 - 3:00 p.m.
●	State Technical Committee Meeting, October 5, 2011

The 'Feds Feed Families' Food Drive Needs YOU!

This summer, USDA is participating in the 3rd annual government-wide Feds Feed Families Food Drive. This effort started on June 1st and will continue through August 31st. The 2011 Feds Feed Families program kickoff set a goal of helping to raise 2 million pounds of food for America's needy families.

In June, USDA donated over 100,000 pounds of food to food

Continued on p. 3

Inside this Issue:	
Dairy Energy Efficiency Initiative (continued)	2
Featured Employees: SCA Interns Amanda Gagnon & Tatiana Quintana	2
US Coral Reef Task Force to Fund Projects in Guánica-Rio Loco Watershed	2
NRCS Caribbean Area Holds First Technical Training	2
Meet the St. Croix Field Office	3
Feds Feed Families Food Drive Needs You!	3
Efrain Bermudez Selected Caribbean Area Hispanic Farmer/Rancher of the Year	3
U.S. FWS Seeks Comments on Environmental Assessment, Restoring Wildlife Habitat on Desecheo Island	4

Dairy Energy Efficiency Initiative [cont. from p. 1]



On-farm energy audit data collector trainees pose during April 25 certification workshop in Arecibo.

Data Collector Training certification workshop on April 25, 2011 for 16 EnSave, PR Agriculture Department, Extension Service and El Atlántico RC&D personnel and private engineers. These personnel will conduct the on-farm energy audits for eligible producers to identify how farm operations can

will be developed and other types of renewable energy efficiencies implemented to reduce dairy operation costs in Puerto Rico.

Implementation is occurring in stages. The National Association of Resource Conservation & Development Councils (NARC&DC) funded and conducted a Farm Energy Audit

become more energy-efficient. The on-farm energy audit results will then be used to develop cost-effective AgEMPs.

Eligible dairy producer participants of the Dairy Farm High Quality Production Unit (Unidad de Calidad de Alto Rendimiento, UCAR) may apply for the AgEMP assistance

at their local NRCS office. EQIP payments are made directly to program participants for development of an AgEMP.

The 2008 Farm Bill provides NRCS with the authority to use EQIP financial assistance to fund installation of practices and conservation activities as part of an Agricultural Energy Management Plan (AgEMP) developed for each program participant's eligible land.

For more information on the new Dairy Energy Efficiency Initiative, please contact José Castro, Assistant Director, at 787-766-5206 x226 or Jose.Castro@pr.usda.gov, or Jaime Valentín, State Resource Conservationist, at 787-766-5206 x229 or Jaime.Valentin@pr.usda.gov.

July / August Conservation Tips

- Water plants in early morning or evening to conserve soil moisture.
- **Fix leaky or dripping water faucets:** a leak of one drop of water a second from a faucet can waste as much as 48 gallons of water a week!

NRCS Caribbean Area Holds 1st Technical Training

NRCS hosted the first-ever Technology Workshop targeted specifically to the Caribbean Area on June 7-9, 2011. The workshop was attended by 17 State Office staff (Ecological, Engineer and Soils) and District Conservationists.

Topics covered included the new EQIP Energy Initiative, AutoCAD Engineering Design, Crop Diversity, Soil Quality, Manure Management, Streambank Stabilization & Restoration, and Writing Conservation Practice Standards.

Featured Employees: SCA Interns Amanda Gagnon & Tatiana Quintana



SCA Interns, Amanda Gagnon (left) and Tatiana Quintana (right).

The NRCS Caribbean Area is pleased to welcome two Student Conservation Association (SCA) Interns to our family.

Amanda Gagnon and Tatiana Quintana joined the Caribbean Area team in January 2011

and will be working with us throughout the year. Amanda is assisting the St. Croix Field Office in the USVI and Tatiana is assisting the State Office in San Juan.

Amanda is an SCA veteran who began her volunteer service with the group in high school. Upon her graduation from the University of Maine – Machias with an Environmental Sciences degree, she continued her SCA volunteer service working with NRCS in

New Hampshire.

Tatiana is an AmeriCorps volunteer on her second tour with SCA. Her degree in Geography with a Spanish minor from the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill has prepared her well for her administrative and GIS work in Puerto Rico.

Please join us in welcoming Amanda and Tatiana to the Caribbean!

US Coral Reef Task Force to Fund Projects in Guánica-Rio Loco Watershed



Vulnerable coral reef habitat off-shore of La Parguera.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), in partnership with U.S. Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) members USDA-NRCS and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), announced the availability of grant funding for projects to help restore natural resources

in the Guánica-Rio Loco watershed in Puerto Rico.

Since 2009, the USCRTF has invested in conservation and restoration projects in the Guánica-Rio Loco Watershed to address the loss of live coral on the reefs of Guánica Bay resulting from land-based

sources of pollution. For more information on the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Partnership Initiative Grant Program, including guidelines for applications, visit www.nfwf.org/coralreefs. Pre-proposal applications were due July 1, 2011 online at www.nfwf.org/easygrants.

Meet the St. Croix Field Office



NRCS St. Croix Field Office Staff, L - R: Rudy G. O'Reilly, Jr., District Conservationist, Faye Williams, Secretary, Julie Wright, RC&D Coordinator, and Amanda Gagnon, SCA Intern.

The NRCS St. Croix Field Office serves the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands (St. Croix, St. John, St. Thomas & Water Island) from the USDA Service

Center in Gallows Bay, St. Croix.

The team of Rudy O'Reilly, Julie Wright, Faye Williams and Amanda Gagnon brings a wealth of experience in specialized areas of botany, pollution prevention, business management and environmental sciences. We are available to assist you with your conservation needs.

We are co-located with the Farm Service Agency and Rural Development office to provide a one-stop center for your farm and rural home loan needs.

Call us at 340-692-9662 or 340-692-9632 x. 3, or stop by the office, on the 2nd floor of the Antilles Building, across the street from the Gallows Bay post office.

Caribbean Area RC&D Councils Leave the NRCS Nest

Elimination of national RC&D program funding from the fiscal year 2011 federal budget has forced hundreds of RC&D Councils across the country to move from under NRCS' protective wing.

In the Caribbean Area, the El Atlántico RC&D Council has relocated to a new office in Barranquitas. They can now be contacted at 787-215-9189 or torresavilesjosea@yahoo.com, or by mail at: PO Box 172, Barranquitas, PR 00794. El Caribe RC&D has also relo-

cated. They can now be contacted at 787-914-6463 or francisco.inostrozalaboy@upr.edu.

The Virgin Islands RC&D Council has found new housing on Queen Street in Christiansted, St. Croix. They can now be contacted at 340-692-9111 or via email at vircd@usvircd.org, or stop by their new office on the 2nd floor of the VI Care Building, one block south of St. Mary's Catholic School.

Efrain Bermúdez Selected as the Caribbean Area Hispanic Farmer/Rancher of the Year

Efrain Bermúdez was born into a farming family. Like his father and grandfather before him, he is rearing cattle on his 50 acre farm on St. Croix, USVI.

He is using EQIP to improve and protect the natural resources on his land:

- Older practices such as untreated fence posts are being replaced by treated lumber and metal posts.
- Pastures are being subdivided with a chute for easier animal rotation.
- Unwanted woody species like *acacia* and *ziziphus* are being removed to gradually increase pasture grass production.

- The old trough is being refurbished with a brand new stamping pad.

Mr. Bermúdez is also a good steward of the land. Natural areas are maintained to provide habitat for local wildlife. Deer, egrets, ducks and other water fowl frequent his two ponds. His herd is also being improved. Jersey and Holstein crosses are slowly being phased out and pure Senepol, a breed developed on St. Croix, are being bred and stocked on the farm.

As part of his EQIP contract, Mr. Bermúdez also plans to use improved grass species to increase nutrient content and provide more erosion control in the pastures. By staying on track with his con-

Feds Feed Families Food Drive Needs You! (cont. from p.1)

pantries across the country - a strong start towards reaching the Departmental goal of collecting 500,000 pounds of food by August 31st.



Shelves of donated food at the Capital Area Food Bank. (USOPM Photo by: Rob Joswiak 5/26/11)

Here in the Caribbean, all USDA agencies are collaborating on this initiative, with the Rural Development (RD) Agency assuming the lead role. Together, we have set three dates to collect non-perishable, nutritious food and share it with food banks to help feed families in local communities who are depending on this assistance during tough economic times. The dates remaining for the collection are July 27th and August 31st. Field offices should forward food donated to the nearest RD office, or to the Rural Development State Office in San Juan.

Our efforts will help millions of Americans across the country that turn to food banks and food pantries for emergency food assistance over the summer. Please visit: www.fedsfeedfamilies.gov/mostwantedlist.pdf for a list of the most wanted items. You can also track our progress online at: www.fedsfeedfamilies.gov. Please take time to make a difference by contributing your non-perishable food items to your local USDA Service Center office **before August 31st**.

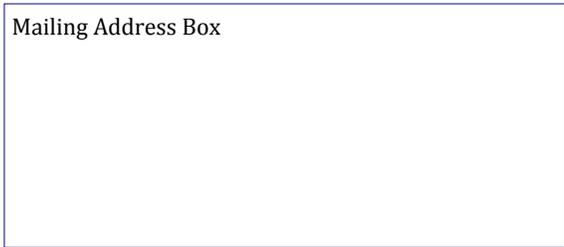


Efrain Bermúdez, 2011 Caribbean Area Hispanic Farmer/Rancher of the Year.

servation plan, Mr. Bermúdez will become one of our success stories and be an inspiration to other farmers in the area.

USDA-NRCS Caribbean Area

IBM Plaza, Suite 604
654 Muñoz Rivera Ave.
Hato Rey, PR 00918-4123
Phone: 787-766-5206
Fax: 787-766-5987



We're on the Web!

www.pr.nrcs.usda.gov



Follow us on Twitter @NRCS_Caribbean & Facebook under NRCS Caribbean



El Yunque Nominated as One of 28 Sites for New "7 Wonders of Nature"

The final phase of the Official New7Wonders of Nature competition is now underway – you can vote on your choices for the top "Seven Natural Wonders of the World" from a selection of 28 official Finalist Candidates. Here in the Caribbean Area, we are honored that El Yunque National Forest is one of only two sites in the United States to be nominated as a finalist (the other is the Grand Canyon in Arizona). El Yunque is the only tropical rain forest in the U.S. National Forest System.

The Official New7Wonders of Nature campaign began in 2007, immediately after the successful campaign to elect the man-made Official New7Wonders of the World. The list of 28 Official Finalist Candidates was whittled down from over 440 participants representing over 220 countries. The wonders themselves will be chosen by an estimated 1 billion votes, with the Official Declaration of the New7Wonders of Nature being held on 11/11/11. Please visit www.new7wonders.com to cast your vote and help make history!

U.S. FWS Seeks Comments on Environmental Assessment, Restoring Wildlife Habitat on Desecheo Island

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking public comments on the recently completed Environmental Assessment, Restoring Wildlife Habitat on Desecheo Island, Puerto Rico. This Environmental Assessment analyzes possible consequences of five alternatives for restoring the island's native habitat and species by eradicating non-native, invasive black rats from the Refuge. The proposed action will assist the native subtropical dry forest to recover and will promote the re-colonization of the island by nesting seabirds.

The Environmental Assessment can be requested via email to caribbeanisland@fws.gov or by calling 787-851-7258, ext. 300. Written comments on the Environmental Assessment will be accepted through August 31, 2011, and can be submitted by e-mail to caribbeanis-

land@fws.gov or by mail to the Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge - DESECHEO, P.O. Box 510, Boquerón, Puerto Rico 00622.

The Desecheo National Wildlife Refuge, part of the Caribbean Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, is a small, uninhabited island located approximately 13 miles west of Puerto Rico. The refuge was established in 1976 to protect seabird colonies. Historically, Desecheo Island was a major seabird rookery and it may have had the largest brown booby colony in the world, with estimates of up to 15,000 breeding birds in the early 1900s. Surveys in 2009 revealed no breeding seabirds and, in 2010, only a small number birds were recorded nesting on the coastline and off-shore islets. The loss of nesting seabirds on the island has been



Desecheo Island, Puerto Rico (Courtesy of U.S. FWS).

linked to the presence of introduced predators, including invasive black rats.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Please visit the Service's website at www.fws.gov/caribbean/refuges.

Editorial Board:

- Edwin Almodóvar, State Conservationist
• Ismael Matos, NRI Specialist
• Tatiana Quintana, SCA Intern
• Faye Williams, Secretary
• Julie Wright, Editor & RC&D Coordinator