

NRCS National Funding FY 2012 * (in Millions)

Discretionary funding:

Conservation Technical Assistance	\$762
All Other Conservation Operations Programs	<u>\$137</u>
Total, Conservation Operations	\$899

Mandatory funding:

Total, Farm Bill Programs	<u>\$3,648</u>
Total, NRCS Programs	\$4,547

*rounded to the nearest million

Seventy percent of the land in the United States is privately owned. Farmers, ranchers, forest landowners, tribes and others who own rural lands make daily decisions about natural resource use and management, impacting soil, water, and air quality and wildlife habitat. NRCS provides technical assistance and offers financial assistance to producers who install conservation practices through Farm Bill programs.

NRCS technical assistance is supported with discretionary and mandatory funds. Discretionary funding, provided annually through the Conservation Technical Assistance Program (CTA), is pivotal to NRCS' success. CTA supports everyday operations, scientific research, technology transfer, and is key to the development of individual conservation plans. The land user, in consultation with NRCS specialists, develops a conservation plan that is suited to his or her individual operation. Once a producer has a conservation plan, he or she can implement it with or without further assistance from NRCS.

Financial assistance is available to eligible applicants to implement their conservation plans. Mandatory funds provided through Farm Bill programs are used to cover the costs of detailed planning needed to implement conservation practices and provide financial assistance to help defray some of the costs of conservation practices installation.

The table above describes NRCS' national discretionary and mandatory funding in fiscal year 2012. Farm Bill Program funding details specific to the Caribbean Area are on page 4.



Photo: Ismael Matos, NRCS

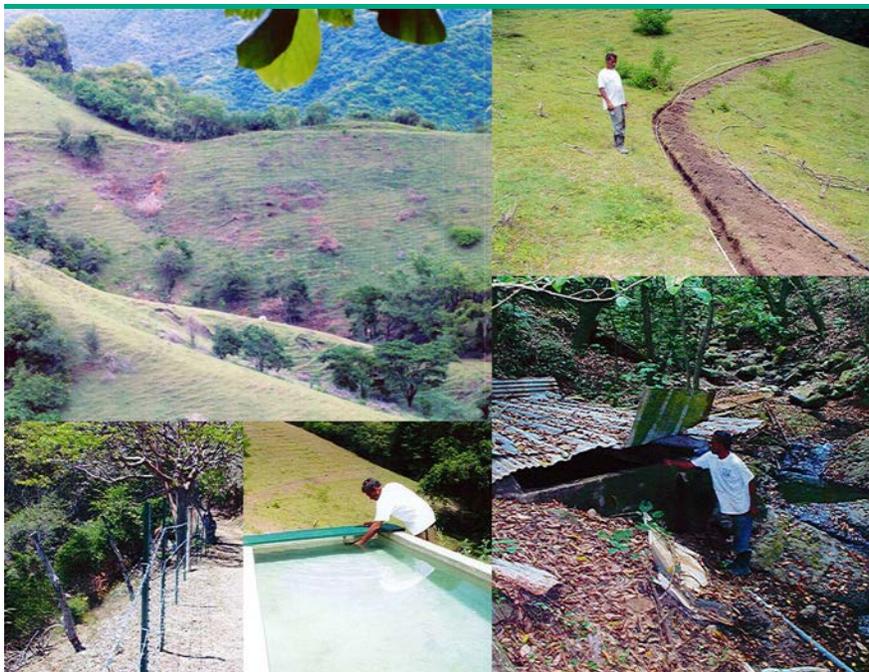
Multiple land uses typically coexist in Caribbean Agricultural Areas.

Caribbean Area NRCS Service Centers



Caribbean Area Quick Facts:

- Caribbean Area = Puerto Rico & the U.S. Virgin Islands
(7 inhabited islands + over 60 smaller cays)
- Number of NRCS Employees = 58
- Number of NRCS Field Offices = 8
- Area of Coral Reefs = over 260 square miles
- Acres of Farmland = 832,700 or 35% of the Area
- Acres of Forestland = 683,400 acres



The Martinez farm clockwise from top left, implementing brush management, installing a pipeline, fencing and watering facility, and improving a spring box.

PHOTOS: LYDIA BRAVO, NRCS

Productive Pastures: NRCS and Farmers Improve Resource Quality

José M. Martínez is a limited resource farmer who rents a 166-acre farm to produce beef cattle in the town of Coamo Arriba in Coamo County, Puerto Rico. The farm drains into the Coamo River.

The farm's soils are mainly Callabo silty clay loam with very steep 35 to 40 percent slopes. The pastures were overgrazed and heavily infested with weedy brush consisting mainly of *Acacia (Vachelia Farnesiana)*. The farm had only one watering trough, even though the property had a spring with a good water flow. Mr. Martínez needed help managing his farm and natural resources to improve his livestock operation while conserving soil and water on the property.

Mr. Martínez worked with USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) District Conservationist, Nicis Vega, and Soil Conservationist, Lydia Bravo, to develop a conservation plan to improve farm management. They established a planned grazing system and developed the existing spring to supply water to a new watering facility to provide fresh water for the cattle. Mr. Martínez installed:

- 65 acres of brush management;
- 1,800 feet of pasture fences;
- 748-gallon watering facility; and
- 500 feet of pipeline.

Mr. Martínez also implemented a prescribed grazing system. With the installation of these practices, resource concerns addressed included water quantity and water quality, soil erosion, plant productivity and animal stress and health.

Mr. Martínez was able to increase the number of cattle on his farm (from 100 to 150 head), simultaneously increasing his income while conserving natural resources due to better farm management practices. He sees an improvement in pasture productivity and is very grateful for NRCS' help. Mr. Martínez is now more knowledgeable of conservation practices and the benefits of applying conservation measures on the land.



NRCS in the Caribbean Area partners with local government agencies, community groups and farmers to restore habitats from ridge (Maricao forest, left; sharp-shinned hawk, insert) to reef (Guánica Bay, right).

PHOTOS: YADIRA FELICIANA, NRCS; HAIL RODRIGUEZ, U.S. FWS

Landscape Initiatives Target Natural Resource Concerns in the Caribbean Area

Throughout the Caribbean Area, NRCS works with landowners to protect our unique habitats and endemic species. The Guánica-Río Loco Watershed Project and the Shade Coffee Initiative are examples of two multi-agency efforts to preserve and protect coral reef and forest ecosystems. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works with producers and partners in these watersheds to conserve soil, reduce nutrient runoff and re-forest buffer areas while improving agricultural productivity. Better land management protects water quality, improves wildlife habitat for threatened and endangered species, and enhances near shore coastal and coral reef health.

Through the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program, NRCS Mayagüez field office staff partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to restore wildlife habitat in steep buffer areas around Maricao State Forest through the Shade Coffee Initiative, and in the Upper Río Loco watershed through the Coral Reef Initiative. Re-forestation provides food and shelter for endangered species such as the Puerto Rican Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus venator*), four species of Coquí frogs (*Eleutherodactylus wightmanae*, *E. gryllus*, *E. karlschmidti* and *E. richmondi*), and the endemic Puerto Rican boa (*Epicrates inornatus*) and Puerto Rican Woodpecker (*Melanerpes portoricencis*).

NRCS and FWS staff have helped over 40 farms to convert their coffee plantations from sun-grown coffee to shade-grown coffee. They have propagated and planted native trees to improve over 500 acres of land around the Maricao State Forest. In the Upper Río Loco watershed,

partners planted 16,865 native trees, including Moca (*Andira inermis*), Capa Prieto (*Cordia alliodora*), Guamá (*Inga laurina*) and Guaba (*Inga vera*). Conversion from sun-grown to shade-grown coffee reduces soil erosion, improves soil and water quality, and conserves soil and water. Most importantly for farmers, it also increases coffee quality, quantity and yield, resulting in increased income.

Over 4,000 acres in the Upper & Lower Río Loco watersheds have been enrolled in the Environmental Quality Incentives Program to benefit over 250 square miles of marine ecosystems, including federally endangered Elkhorn and Staghorn corals (*Acropora* sp.) and Green and Hawksbill sea turtles (*Chelonia mydas* and *Eretmochelys imbricata*). NRCS has contracted with 17 producers to conserve resources on 1,194 acres of farmland and stabilize 600 meters of the Río Loco's banks with structural and bioengineering practices. Other soil and water conservation practices installed include:

- Four 3-acre reservoirs and three 3-acre sediment basins;
- 8,500 feet of open channels and 8,000 feet of pipeline;
- 8,500 feet of grassed waterways;
- 28,500 feet of fencing and 14 livestock watering facilities;
- 195 acres of pasture hay planting and 190 acres of access control;
- 197 acres of critical area planting and 10 acres of trees,
- 581 acres of multi-story cropping; and
- Pump houses with irrigation system upgrades to serve over 1,500 acres.

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Focus on Helping Underserved Clients in the Caribbean Area

The Caribbean Area NRCS makes every effort to include beginning, limited-resource and socially-disadvantaged farmers in our programs. For example, Arecibo Soil Conservation Technician, Linnette Rosado, is working with Mr. Ernesto Santiago Miranda, a Limited Resource Farmer from Pozas in Ciales, PR, to conserve resources on his farm through EQIP.

Mr. Santiago leases 8 acres of land on which he cultivates about 6 acres of coffee. Mr. Santiago is also disabled (he has only one leg), but that does not prevent him from actively working his farm - the main source of income for his family. Last year, Mr. Santiago and his son hand-pruned 1.3 acres of coffee trees. Mr. Santiago plans to continue growing coffee while applying conservation practices that help him improve soil quality and conserve natural resources. He will plant 5 more fields (2 acres) in the higher-producing Caturra coffee variety, and will



Above: Domaso Santiago, the farmer's son, surveys their hand-pruned coffee trees. Right: Mr. Ernesto Santiago and his wife at their farm house.



Photos: Linnette Rosado, NRCS

soon be hand pruning two more fields (1 acre). Contour farming and residue management (no till) practices will also be implemented. NRCS Arecibo FO personnel will continue to assist him in improving the sustainability of his farm.

FY 2011 and FY 2012 Contracts and Financial Assistance to Caribbean Area Participants by Program

Program	Number of Contracts/Agreements		Financial Assistance to Producers	
	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2011	FY 2012
EQIP	316	353	\$4,561,000	\$4,960,000
WHIP	10	0	\$104,000	\$0
Grand Total	326	353	\$4,665,000	\$4,960,000

Discretionary funds through the Conservation Technical Assistance for the Caribbean Area in FY 2012 was \$2.9 million

Sources: FMMI, ProTracts 10/2/2012 and NEST 10/4/2012

NRCS strives to provide current and correct information in a timely manner. Please contact your state conservationist or an NRCS legislative specialist if you need assistance. You can reach NRCS Legislative Affairs Division at (202) 720-2771.