



Natural Resources Conservation Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# CARIBBEAN AREA

Annual Report  
Fiscal Year 2025

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*Cover photo by Outreach  
Coordinator Némesis Ortiz Declet.*



# FARM BILL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

NRCS provides conservation solutions so farmers can protect natural resources and feed a growing world. We are committed to putting **farmers first** by working hand in hand with our communities to protect and improve the health of our soil, water, air, plants, animals and people. Much of the conservation work completed on private lands is done with financial assistance through Farm Bill Conservation Programs.

Total program payments for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 were about **\$13.36 million**.

## Financial Assistance by Programs:

The **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** is NRCS' flagship financial assistance program for working lands, helping producers make improvements to benefit agriculture and conservation.

### EQIP

- Farmer Contracts – 226
- Obligations – \$19.53 million
- Payments – \$12,54 million
- Acres – 7,710

The **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** offers financial incentives for producers to not only maintain the existing level of conservation on the land, but to incorporate new or advanced conservation activities to take stewardship to the next level.

### CSP

- Farmer Contracts – 100
- Obligations – \$3.01 million
- Payments – \$826,529
- Acres – 7,117

Farm Bill Conservation Programs are helping producers prepare their operations for the challenges ahead – from an increasing global population to extreme weather events like severe droughts and flooding.



*Photo: Implementation of Residue Tillage Management conservation practices in plantain field with fallow residue.  
Photo by District Conservationist Christian Vargas.*



# EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM



In FY 2025, NRCS's **Emergency Watershed Protection Program (EWPP)** continued to help local communities recover from past natural disasters by providing technical and financial assistance to relieve imminent threats to life and property caused by floods, windstorms, and other events. The program has addressed damages from Hurricane Maria (2017), Hurricane Fiona (2022), and Tropical Storm Ernesto (2024), over the past several years. For Maria, all **326 cleaning and structural projects** have been completed with **\$2.14 million** in support, and **2 dam repairs** are currently underway with more than **\$4.4 million** in funding. For Fiona, all **85** cleaning projects were finished, and six structural projects are progressing, backed by **\$11.20 million**. For Ernesto, **78 Damage Survey Reports** were approved, **10 clearing projects** completed, and the remaining clearing and structural projects are in the bid process, with one buyout option pending approval, supported by **\$11.64 million**. Altogether, EWPP invested nearly **\$24.98 million** to restore watersheds, reduce risks, and protect public infrastructure across Puerto Rico.

*Photo: State Environmental Compliance Specialist Lisbeth San Miguel-Rivera, along with Engineering staff, conducting a Damage Survey Report (DSR) at Toa Baja, Puerto Rico. Photo by District Conservationist Jayson Mas.*

## ENGINEERING DIVISION

Through our **Engineering Division** we support our Field Offices and clients with technical advice, design and certification of NRCS engineering conservation practices. Engineering staff certified **483 engineering conservation practices** during FY 2025, resulting in **\$9.14 million** in customer reimbursements for implemented practices.

The most certified  
Engineering Conservation Practices in  
FY 2025 were:

1. **Combustion System Improvements (81)**
2. **Roof Runoff Structure (56)**
3. **Watering Facility (46)**
4. **Heavy Use Area Protection (34)**
5. **Pumping Plant (33)**
6. **Irrigation System, Microirrigation (33)**



*Photo: Pre construction meeting with farmers and contractors to discuss a geomembrane installation to implement Conservation Practice 521 Pond Sealing or Lining, in Fajardo, PR. Photo by Resources Conservationist Norberto Valentín.*



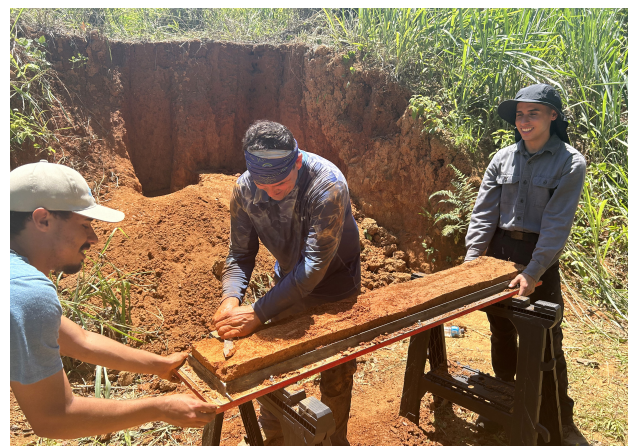
# SOILS DIVISION

During FY 2025, the **Soils Division** evaluated **16 requests** for Highly Erodible Land (HEL) and wetland determinations for Food Security Act compliance and assisted and responded to **20 Farm Protection Policy Act evaluations** on **1,989 acres**. Technical soil services (TSS) provided in FY 2025 benefited over **3,179 people** and close to **135** different people, groups, and organizations in the Caribbean Area. The TSS provided services had an impact on over **1,927 acres**. The Soils Division also evaluated a total of **156 National Resources Inventory segments**, which are small sample areas of land used to study soil conditions. This work ensures accurate soil data for conservation planning and resource management decisions.

The National Cooperative Soil Survey and the Soil and Plant Science Division conducted **13 projects**, updating **10 official series descriptions** and **75,153 acres** of the Soil Survey Geographic Database (SSURGO), a tool that contains mapped information about soil and other natural components' properties. Updated SSURGO information aids the development of models to predict soils behavior under different uses for natural resources planning and management.

The Web Soil Survey application, which provides official soil survey data for public use, recorded **17,263 hits**. The team also promoted new local Soil Survey interpretations for a plantain productivity index, as well as a suitability of cacao and coffee, through various webinars. These interpretations assist land managers and users identify the most optimal areas for producing plantain, cacao, and coffee based on the inherent soil properties of the specified area.

Furthermore, the Soils Division celebrated the successful launch of the **Virtual Caribbean Soils Museum**. This initiative, part of an agreement between Arte Suelo Ser Inc. and NRCS, provides an immersive and educational experience by showcasing a rich array of soil profiles, ecological sites, and land use interpretations. This digital platform is now a key resource for researchers, land managers, and educators, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the region's unique soil heritage.



Photos: Left: NRCS Caribbean Area Major Land Resources Area (MLRA) staff conducting Coastal Zone Soil Surveys at the Piñones Natural Reserve (photo by MLRA Soil Survey Leader Samuel Rios). Top Right: MLRA Soil Survey Leader Samuel Rios and two Soil Science students collecting a Soil Monolith with the Puerto Rico Agriculture Extension Service at Finca Alzamora, Mayaguez, PR (photo by Soil Scientist Manuel Matos). Bottom Right: Children painting with Puerto Rican soil-based paint developed by partner Arte-Suelo-Ser Inc. at an outreach event (photo by Outreach Coordinator Némesis Ortiz Declét).



## ECOLOGICAL SCIENCES DIVISION



In 2025, the **Ecological Sciences Division (ESD)** helped farmers and communities in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands put conservation into action. The team delivered over **50 training courses** and workshops, supported hundreds of participants and partners, and provided continuous technical assistance through field visits and consultations. ESD also developed and updated over **20 planning tools and guides**, making conservation planning faster and more consistent. To keep projects compliant, the team has completed over **500** environmental evaluation reviews throughout multiple years, while supporting over **50 emergency watershed projects** and collaborating on Cooperative Agreement and Conservation Innovation grantees and interagency initiatives. These efforts strengthened planning quality, enhanced disaster recovery, and improved conservation outcomes, helping communities protect land and water and build resilience for the future.

*Photo: Cultural resources assessment at Juana Diaz; left: Marines Colon-Gonzalez, NRCS State Cultural Resources Specialist, right: Nicole Seda, Archaeology student, American Conservation Experience (ACE) Intern. Photo by U.S. Forest Service Heritage Program Manager Raymond Feliciano.*

## COOPERATIVE & INTER-AGENCY AGREEMENTS

During FY 2025, **\$402,000** were invested through interagency agreements with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to leverage technical expertise, personnel, and resources for the implementation of Farm Bill Conservation Programs and habitat restoration initiatives over a two-year period, specifically targeting agricultural lands adjacent to key National Wildlife Refuges in Puerto Rico. In addition, we entered into a new cooperative agreement with the East Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), obligating **\$53,000** to engage experienced personnel in support of technical services under EWPP.

A **\$75,000** agreement with the U.S. Forest Service was also established to continue developing Ecological Site Descriptions, which provide land managers with essential information for evaluating land suitability, management responses, and long-term productivity.

These cooperative and contribution agreements strengthen partnerships by fostering collaboration and resource sharing between the NRCS Caribbean Area and conservation-focused agencies and organizations.

Additionally, modifications to existing cooperative agreements resulted in more than **\$100,000** in new obligations. One modification expanded the agreement with the Caribe Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to retain experienced technical assistance providers supporting the EWPP Program in southeastern Puerto Rico. Another modification enhanced the cooperative agreement with Arte Suelo Ser Inc., adding new activities that address identified needs in the Caribbean Area and advance soil literacy across Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands through visual, experiential, scientific, and community-based approaches.



# COOPERATIVE & INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS (CONTINUED)

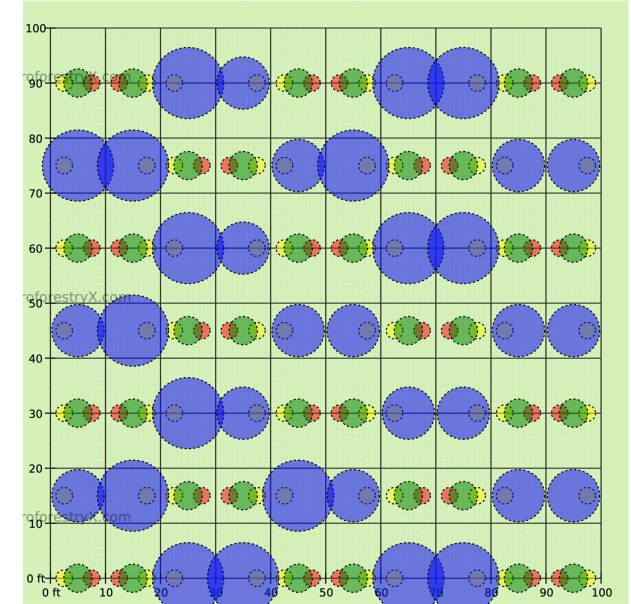
## SUCCESS STORY

### Transforming Caribbean Agroforestry: A Story of Collaboration and Innovation

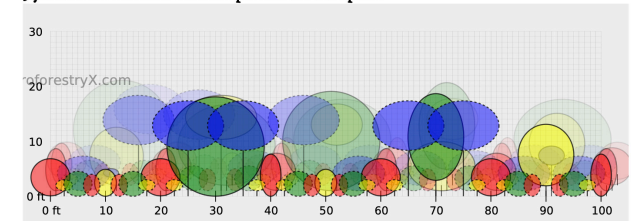
The **Conservation Innovation Grants (CIG)** program is a competitive initiative that provides funding for the development of innovative tools and technologies aimed at advancing natural resource conservation on private lands. Through CIG funding, NRCS awarded a grant to Envirosurvey Inc. to expand the AgroforestryX Design Tool for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This collaborative project united Envirosurvey Inc., NRCS, and the tool's original co-developers—Craig Elevitch, PhD, Neil Logan, and Sophia Bowart of AgroforestryX LLC—to enhance the platform for Caribbean agroforestry applications. The expanded tool now supports comprehensive agroforestry system planning, including planting pattern selection, habitat-appropriate species recommendations, pruning schedules, and growth visualization specifically tailored for use in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Working with regional agronomists, botanists, and foresters, the project team conducted **eight workshops** and several field visits to evaluate **160 tree and plant species**. This thorough assessment led to **84 species selections—including 60 native and endemic varieties**—surpassing the original target of **50 species by 68%**. Project deliverables included bilingual educational brochures, illustrated field guides, and successful beta testing with agency staff. The enhanced AgroforestryX Design Tool is now publicly available, providing critical support for regenerative agroforestry planning and strengthening natural resource conservation efforts across Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

AgroforestryX

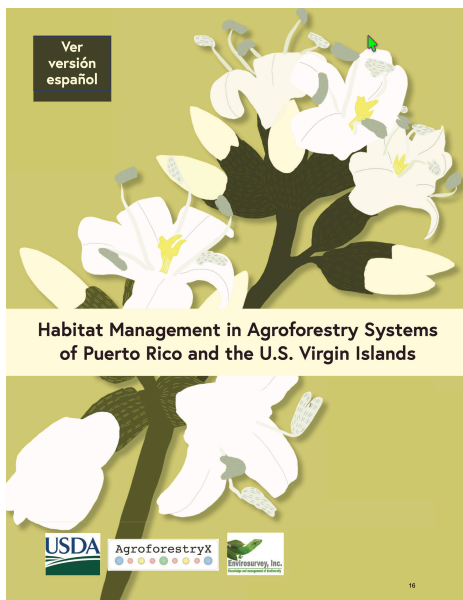
3-year overview visualization of canopies medium-term plants



3-year sideview visualization of canopies medium-term plants



*Photo: The AgroforestryX Design Tool helps forest farming producers in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands develop multi-story agroforestry systems that meet NRCS standards.*



*Photos: Left: The upgraded AgroforestryX tool features bilingual illustrated guides for wildlife habitat management. Right: The AgroforestryX team visited Puerto Rico to conduct field assessments and make sure that the tool considers Caribbean conditions.*



# OUTREACH & ENGAGEMENT

NRCS Caribbean Area has significantly expanded its outreach efforts to engage communities in conservation and natural resource programs. During FY 2025, the team participated in over **112 events** in Puerto Rico, reaching more than **12,777 people** through workshops, presentations, interactive booths, and community outreach activities about NRCS' conservation programs and resources. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, NRCS conducted about **12** similar events, reaching over **1,837 people**. Through these outreach efforts, NRCS promotes **farmer empowerment** by focusing on enhancing awareness, understanding and access to the resources available to achieve real improvements in water management, soil health, and conservation.

## 2025 53rd Agriculture & Food Fair

The 2025 St. Croix 53rd Agriculture & Food Fair (AgriFest), one of the largest agricultural fairs in the U.S. Virgin Islands, attracted thousands of local and international visitors to celebrate agriculture, food, and culture. NRCS Caribbean Area participated with an educational booth, providing information on conservation practices and programs. Through interactive displays and one-on-one engagement, NRCS reached over **350 attendees**, strengthening awareness of sustainable agriculture and natural resource stewardship.



Photo: Outreach Coordinator Némesis Ortiz Declét and Conservation Planning and Compliance Specialist Urayoan Díaz Pacheco at the U.S. Virgin Islands 2025 53rd AgriFest.

## 2025 Puerto Rico Career and Technical Education Expo

On February 12, 2025, NRCS participated in the Puerto Rico Career and Technical Education (CTE) Show & Expo, an event that underscores the vital role of career and technical education in shaping the future workforce of Puerto Rican youth. With over **6,000 attendees**, NRCS engaged students and educators through an educational booth and hands-on demonstrations. Additionally, NRCS technical experts contributed as judges in Future Farmers of America soil health and tree demonstration contests for middle and high school students, reinforcing the agency's commitment to promoting conservation knowledge and supporting agricultural education.



Photo: Soil Scientists Manuel Matos and Jacqueline (Jacky) Vega, with Agroforestry Grassland Management Specialist Francisco Rivera, at the 2025 Puerto Rico Career and Technical Education Expo.





*Photo: Ola is the friendliest cow in Hato Don Benja, an NRCS partner in Hatillo, Puerto Rico. Photo by Outreach Coordinator Némesis Ortiz Declet.*

**12,135 acres**

of conservation applied to improve  
**Environmental Quality**

**4,920 acres**

of cropland with conservation applied to improve  
**Soil Health & Sustainability**

**265 acres**

of conservation applied on land being actively  
managed for  
**Wildlife Habitat**

**292 acres**

of land with conservation applied to improve  
**Irrigation Efficiency**



**Helping People Help the Land**





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