

Welcome Carlos Torres, new District Conservationist for Highlands County

Carlos is a welcome addition to Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District's staff. Since June 23, Carlos has served as the District Conservationist for the federal portion of our office, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). He comes to us from Moultrie, Georgia, where his position was Soil Conservationist. The position in the Sebring office was a promotion for Carlos and a great opportunity to expand his horizons.

Carlos obtained his Masters degree in Animal Science and Animal Nutrition in 2005 from the University of Puerto Rico. Since childhood, he has been interested in plants and animals. Growing up on a small, family farm, Carlos had his share of learning experiences and hard work. Reflecting on his upbringing, Carlos stated, "There is a lot of work on the farm; we raised rabbits and chickens. Since growing up I always worked hard on the farm with my father. My grandmother is the one who loves plants and helping her with the potting, weeding, and fertilizing really got me interested in plants too."

Along with his mother and father, Carlos grew up with his older brother, Carlos Javier and younger sister, Mariluz. "My dad wanted me to be an engineer like my older brother; he said we'd make a good team. But I wanted to do something that would help the environment and teach people how to understand how they impact it both good and bad."

Carlos got involved with NRCS as an Earth Team volunteer at the San Sebastian Field Office in Puerto Rico. "We worked on terraces, pasture and forage management, nutrient management, and monitoring water runoff from outside the farms. I really liked the work."

After acquiring his Bachelors Degree in Animal Science in 2002, a project came available through the Environmental Protection Agency and NRCS to work with the environment and water quality problems in relation to animal production. Equipped with the knowledge, education and desire to help the environment, Carlos was on his way.

Carlos started with NRCS on July 25, 2005 as a Soil Conservationist. He covered two counties and the properties he was responsible for were in Moultrie and Sylvester, Georgia. "Sebring was not only a promotional opportunity, but a great opportunity to increase my experience because of the varieties of land uses here. In Georgia it is mostly row crops, beef cows and chickens. In Highlands County there is citrus, dairies and a different type of agriculture."

Before starting work in the Sebring office, Carlos visited his family's home in Puerto Rico. But it's not much of a restful vacation when he goes home. "I always work on the farm with my father and mother when I go home; I don't get much rest. I also help my grandmother with the plants. My grandmother tells me I should rest and enjoy my vacation, but I really enjoy the work." Carlos made his grandmother, who had been very sick, extremely happy the last time he visited. "The day before Mother's Day, I replanted all the plants along the stairway to the house, taking off all the dead leaves, fertilizing and making them look good. When she saw how beautiful it all looked, she was so happy."

But Carlos has another side to his personality. In addition to being a hard worker, he plays hard too. His hobbies include swimming, biking and running. He plans on doing the Triathlon on July 13<sup>th</sup> and has every intention on doing at least 3 or 4 more before the year ends. He does several events a year.

Carlos has a long history in sports. In 1998 he was on the varsity team for track and field; his main event was the triple jump. In 2001 he joined the weight lifting varsity team. He has won 2 national championships in weight lifting. In 2002 he won the 56 kilograms (123 pounds) class group and in 2004, the 62 kilograms (136 pounds) class group. Being very athletic, Carlos also loves baseball and enjoys most any “team” sport.

When asked about future goals, Carlos replied, “I want to keep working to help the environment. I love my job; it’s a job that we can interact with people and help them and it involves a lot of team work.”

Carlos is most definitely a team player and fits in well with the staff at Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District. We are happy that he has joined our team and look forward to a long and productive future together. Welcome Carlos, we’re glad you’re here!