

Jorge Guevara has lent a helping hand to the NRCS Sebring Field Office

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Sebring Field Office has been the recipient of a helping hand. Jennifer Abbey, former Soil Conservationist, recently left because she was promoted to District Conservationist for Plant City. That left a lot of work and a shortage of people to do it. That's where Jorge Guevara, Soil Conservationist, comes in. He was sent to this office to obtain training and to assist with the work load. Unfortunately, he only gets to stay a couple short weeks before he leaves for his permanent position in the Labelle office. He was hired by NRCS about three weeks ago and we, at the Sebring office will be sad to see him leave.

Jorge has led an interesting life so far. He was born in Venezuela, but raised in New Smyrna Beach. His father had a dairy farm in Venezuela and his mom was from the states. They had relatives in New Smyrna and Jorge's family moved there when he was five years old. Having parents that were involved in agriculture, Jorge joined the Future Farmers of America (FFA) while he was growing up and served as state officer for the organization when he graduated. Being raised in New Smyrna, Jorge learned quickly to love the ocean and anything to do with the water. "I am a water boy. I was brought up around the beach so I surfed, fished, and swam every chance there was."

Jorge's FFA background got him involved in Animal Science. He attended the University of Florida and was working full time paying his way through college. But working, studies, attending classes and homework finally caught up with him. "I needed a break so I applied for a job out of the blue in Hawaii." He landed what many would consider a dream job and began training dolphins for a living. He began his new position with Dolphin Quest, a dolphin interaction attraction. "We had nine dolphins and we trained them with positive reinforcement. They would do what we called behaviors such as flips and they would learn to interact with visitors. I worked with hotel guests and a lot of kids. I loved it and became attached to a dolphin called Hokee, which means Star in Hawaiian." Jorge smiled as he said, "he wasn't the brightest dolphin, but he was really sweet. It took longer to train him the same behaviors that the other dolphins picked up right away."

After one year in Hawaii, Jorge decided that break was over. It was time to get back to reality and finish school. After returning to Gainesville he was offered a Forestry job as a researcher for wetlands, specifically cypress domes. He also worked at the saw mill. He held this position for about two years.

During summer break, he married Amy, his high school sweetheart. After the nuptials and the break, Jorge returned to school and was offered an assistantship to get his Masters Degree. He received a stipend which paid for all of his classes providing he did research for the University. The Soil and Water Science department assigned him subaqueous or underwater soils and sea grass research. Even though he was based in Gainesville, this research took him to Key Largo and Fort Pierce. "I dove six to ten foot depths and took soil samples, did vegetation transects and sea grass cover."

Jorge got involved with NRCS through the University and St. Johns Water Management District. “I worked with many NRCS folks in both places and with my background in soil science; I decided to apply for the Soil Conservationist job when it came up.”

Sebring is just a temporary stop for Jorge. He is being trained by Carlos Torres, District Conservationist for the Sebring Field Office. Once the temporary training is over, he’s off to Labelle. Once he’s there he’ll be visiting local ranchers and advising them on conservation practices and the farm bill programs that are available.

Until Jorge is relocated to his new position, his wife Amy is living in Gainesville. She and their four month old son, Hobie Joseph, will reunite with Jorge once the move is complete. Amy teaches Agricultural Science for Middle School. Jorge is excited to be with his wife and baby again. For now he is making that long drive home every weekend to see them.

Although it hasn’t been long since Jorge joined our team, we will most certainly miss him. He has been a tremendous help to all the staff and a pleasure to work with. We wish you the best in your future endeavors Jorge. The Labelle office is fortunate indeed to be receiving such a great guy!