



**Natural Resources Conservation
Service – Caribbean Area**

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Success Story

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In Conversation with Caribbean Area Women in Agriculture

In celebration of Women’s History Month, we recognize the achievements of four women customers and partners who have been leaders in conserving Puerto Rico’s natural resources.

In Conversation with #WomenInAg: *Marilyn Rosa*

Agri-Business: Strawberry and Grape Farm

Location: Collores Ward, Las Piedras, PR

Background: Marilyn Rosa is a local farmer dedicated to strawberry and grape production in the Municipality of Las Piedras, in central Puerto Rico. Mrs. Rosa is President of the Association of Women in Agri-Business, a recently-formed group of women (and a few men) that works together to improve their knowledge, skills and abilities in agriculture. Marilyn was recently recognized as a successful Agri-Businesswoman and acclaimed in the local newspaper: Primera Hora.



NRCS Engineer and FWPM, Lydia Collazo (left) visits Mrs. Marilyn Rosa’s farm to address her irrigation water management concerns during the 2015 severe drought that impacted most Caribbean Area farmers.

INTERVIEW:

How do you start your day?

I start my day getting up at 6:00 in the morning, having a cup of coffee, talking with my beloved husband, Luis A. Martinez, about the day's plans. Luis has been my biggest support in the establishment of this company. Without his help, I guess this success wouldn’t happen. Then, at about 7:00 a.m., I go to the farm to water my plants and work on many other tasks.

How did you first become interested in agriculture?

Initially it was a hobby for me, it wasn’t constantly practiced, because I only worked with ornamental plants. But the first time I cultivated strawberry seedlings, I started to see it as a possibility. My grandparents were full-time farmers, they grew yams, bananas, taro and vegetables, everything for family consumption and sharing.

Who are your role models in agriculture?

Specific to growing strawberries, I had no one as a role model. However, working in other crop types and agriculture in general, my role model was my grandfather, Don Victor Tirado. I also have a woman who has served as my role model, she is Agro. Aida Maldonado from the Las Piedras Agricultural Extension Service, because she was responsible for providing agriculture training and development opportunities to many women in the Las Piedras area.

How did you know about NRCS, and what is your actual relationship with us?

I learned about NRCS when the Agricultural Extension Service created the Women's Agro-Entrepreneurs project, under the initiative of the Agro. Aida Maldonado. There, Dr. Gladys González from the University of Puerto Rico - Mayagüez Campus, offered training for women who were interested in agriculture as part of the CEMA Program - Business Center for Women in Agriculture (as per Spanish acronyms). We received workshops from NRCS staff, learned about Programs and Services offered by different federal agencies; and I registered my farm in FSA to apply for financial assistance from USDA. I am currently receiving technical assistance from NRCS staff.

In thirty words or less, what is some advice you would offer your fellow women in agriculture?

It is important to get constant training and research on technical and financial aid available for farmers, to keep abreast of environmental changes, and have good farm management to maximize production.



Left: Marilyn Rosa and her husband, Luis A. Martinez; Right: Cover of "Primera Hora" newspaper with the headline: "How Brave They Are!" The newspaper honored these three female farmers as part of Women's History Month. All participated in the "CEMA – CIG Project."

In Conversation with #WomenInAg: *Genoveva Lozada*

Agri-Business: Rivera's Farm

Location: Montones & Tejas Wards, Las Piedras, PR

Background: Genoveva Lozada is a well-known female farmer from eastern Puerto Rico. For over thirty years she has been working side by side with her husband and many other male farmers in the region, not only for her own benefit, but lobbying the government to create new laws to protect farmers and agriculture island-wide.

Genoveva led the Las Piedras Farmers' Association, a group of male farmers created by the Agriculture Extension Service. One of her biggest achievements happened in 2015, when she led a group of farmers and members of the public to defend one of the principal goals established by the East Soil and Water Conservation District: Senators' Project #1002 (now Public Law #94). This legislation protects the 910-acre "La Hermosura Farm," which the PR Government wanted to develop into a private housing project, as an agricultural preserve.

In 2011, she led a group of farmers to promote enactment of a State Law that imposes fines and penalties on anyone who enters private farms without authorization and/or who steal agricultural products from a farm (PC-1087). Genoveva is also one of the pioneer women certified by the PR Department of Agriculture under the Family Market Initiative, sponsored by USDA.

INTERVIEW:***How do you start your day?***

I start my day getting up at 6:00 in the morning, having coffee; then pick up the hoe, materials and seeds to go to the farm to work and plant.

How did you first become interested in agriculture?

My father was a farmer, and when I was a child, before going to school, I had to cross the dirt roads of the farm to bring coffee to Daddy. I was always watching the work he did on the property from afar. As an adult, I married Eufemio Rivera, who comes from a family of farmers, so I have been very involved in agriculture all my life.

Who are your role models in agriculture?

My husband and my dad have been my biggest role models in agriculture. But, in addition to the skills and knowledge they gave me, I also learned many things through the Agricultural Extension Service, especially from Agro. Aida Maldonado, who was our teacher.



Genoveva and Agro. Francisco Inostroza, retired employee from the Agricultural Extension Service.



Mrs. Genoveva Lozada with the PR Governor (2008-2012) Luis G. Fortuño and two farmers celebrating the amendment of Article 206, Public Law 149 (PC-1087).

How do you know about NRCS, and what is your actual relationship with us?

I learned about NRCS through Agro. Aida Maldonado, because I was participating in a training for women who were interested in agriculture as part of the CEMA Program. Aida was seeking professionals to speak about how to improve our farming practices, be better farmers and to conserve our natural resources. She invited NRCS to offer that kind of lecture! After I met them, I told my husband and recommended that he visit the NRCS office to ask for assistance. Presently, we have EQIP contracts on two farms and we also receive technical advice from NRCS staff.

In thirty words or less, what is some advice you would offer your fellow women in agriculture?

In order to be successful in agriculture, you should always seek the services of NRCS and follow the technical recommendations they provide.



Left: Genoveva (at right) participating in one of the many workshops provided by the Department of Agriculture; Right: Genoveva (at right) during an Agriculture Festival, sharing knowledge with other female farmers.

In Conversation with #WomenInAg: *Dr. María de Lourdes Lugo-Torres*

Business: University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus (UPRM)

Location: Agriculture Experimental Station, Gurabo, PR

Background: As an agronomist and professor, Maria de Lourdes Lugo-Torres has been dedicated to researching weeds, evaluating herbicides for possible use with plantain and banana crops; evaluating herbicides in pastures; and evaluating weed control measures in unconventional systems. She travels weekly to Mayagüez to teach the **Weeds PROC-4017** course and laboratory at UPRM.

Dr. Lugo-Torres is also in charge of the 1st Experimental Organic Farm at the Gurabo Agriculture Experimental Station. She has authored several technical guides, including: **“Common Weeds in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands”** and **“Guide to Recognizing Common Weeds in Agricultural Areas of Puerto Rico,”** which have been used in both the island’s universities, as well as among her agronomist



colleagues. She was recently profiled by the Indice Journal for her achievements in agriculture and for being one of the women leaders in her field.

INTERVIEW:

How do you start your day?

I usually start my day by getting up at 5:30 in the morning, and walking about one hour every morning. Then, I am in my office by 7:30 a.m. to visit the experiments underway in the field, visit the organic farms and return to my office to write, read and evaluate Journal articles, because I also am the UPR's Associate Journalist. Sometimes I stay in the office answering phone calls, responding weed consultation requests, helping students or preparing my next lectures.

How did you first become interested in agriculture?

My father studied Animal Industries and my mother worked as a secretary at the Agricultural Extension Service for 33 years.

Who are your role models in agriculture?

Dr. Nelia Acosta was my inspiration, she was a nematologist and always motivated me to continue studying. Also Dr. Ribero, a Colombian teacher and herbalist that I met during my summer practice at the Juana Díaz Agriculture Experimental Station. He gave first motivated me to work in research areas related to weeds (June-July 1980).

How do you know about NRCS, and what is your actual relationship with us?

I met NRCS through Prof. Edwin Más. I always admired him because he is a hard worker and had grass publications and drawings. My actual relationship with NRCS is collaborative, with everything related to weed workshops and with Agro. Edwin Más in publishing weed manuals. I have also participated in CIG projects related to agriculture in transition and organic.

In thirty words or less, what is some advice you would offer your fellow women in agriculture?

To become entrepreneurs; and if your goals are post-graduate studies, do not give up and work hard. They will find obstacles, but only strong and consistent work will help them prevail.



Left: Dr. Lugo-Torres on the cover of the Indice Journal. The article is titled "There is work opportunity on the land: The Gurabo Ag. Extension Service's goal is getting the best crop production." Right: Dr. Maria de Lourdes Lugo-Torres (center) with her husband and son.



In Conversation with #WomenInAg: *María de Jesús*

Agri-Business: Hidro-Cultivos Carolinenses

Location: Santa Cruz & Hoyo Mulas Wards, Carolina, PR

Background: Maria de Jesus is a passionate entrepreneur in Agri-Business, working in agricultural crops. She currently has two farms in Carolina, PR: an approx. 2-acre farm in Bo. Santa Cruz, where she grows Tahitian limes, plantains, bananas, hydroponic varieties of lettuce, herbs and other spices. Her second farm is approx. 200 acres in Bo. Hoyo Mulas, where she cultivates bananas, eggplants, tomatoes, and other crops. Since she was a child, Maria enjoyed planting corn and tomatoes much more than playing with dolls.

INTERVIEW:

How do you start your day?

I get up at 6:00 in the morning, sometimes I get breakfast. Then, I start working in the plant propagation area. Everything is done at the family level. My responsibilities range from project manager: providing instructions for daily work and marketing the products, to planting, watering, and doing anything and everything else that is needed. Each family member receives instructions and they must complete the assigned task during the day.

How did you first become interested in agriculture?

In 2006, we went through an economic crisis in our household and my husband encouraged me to start a hydroponics project. But it wasn't until 2007 that I took my first course on the subject and graduated in hydroponics. This awakened in me a deep interest, coupled with the constant motivation of my husband, although I always preferred the traditional planting methods. However, in 2009, I was unemployed and I was forced to start this agriculture project.

Who are your role models in agriculture?

I really don't have any role model, only been initiative to learn financial management. I had to take many courses to establish my company. During those years, I participated in many training workshops provided by the Agricultural Extension Service, USDA-NRCS, the University of Puerto Rico - CEMA, etc.

How do you know about NRCS, and what is your actual relationship with us?

I discovered NRCS when technical staff gave a few presentations to the group of Women Agro-Entrepreneurs in Las Piedras, PR, as part of the CEMA Project organized by UPRM and the Agricultural Extension Service. This group has been excellent because it has given us vital training. At the present, NRCS is very important for me, I do nothing on my farms without calling NRCS for technical advice. I received financial assistance through an EQIP contract for the farm at Bo. Santa Cruz, where I installed a Seasonal High Tunnel, and also received technical advice for planting citrus.



María De Jesús participating in the "Agriculture Family Market" displaying the produce she provides to local customers.

In thirty words or less, what is some advice you would offer your fellow women in agriculture?

Believe in yourselves, no matter what anyone tells you, we must always pursue our dreams. I always trust in God above all things because that's the key to my success. As a last recommendation, include your family members in the process and always take them into consideration so you all can achieve your goals together!



Left: Maria displays her products at a local Agriculture Fair celebrating the LOGO “Del Pais” – a brand name used to identify local agricultural products. Right” Dr. Myrna Comas, PR Secretary of Agriculture, joins Maria at her farm display.



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