



# Asian Pacific Islander Organization

Jan-Apr 2010

## APIO NEWS

We have a new mailing address because Treasurer Nick Vira is now a DC in Montana. It is:

APIO  
PO Box 2391  
Billings, MT 59103  
Congratulations, Nick!

## Time to Renew Your Membership

Now that the New Year is here, it's time to renew your membership in the APIO. The membership form is on the APIO Web site under "Forms and Logos."

## Articles Needed for Next Newsletter

The next APIO newsletter will be published on May 1, to celebrate Asian Pacific Heritage Month. Please submit articles by April 1 to Liz at [liz.warner@nv.usda.gov](mailto:liz.warner@nv.usda.gov).

## President's Message

Season's Greetings APIO members. As the President for the APIO, it is my honor to serve in our Council. I also want to congratulate the other newly elected council officers and regional representatives and look forward to working alongside all of you to achieve our organization's goals over the next two years. I want to thank our past, President Kent Matsutani, for his leadership the past two years with his commitment and success of re-establishing purpose and direction of our employee organization. Serving as the Exec. VP under Kent's tutelage, I certainly learned the secrets to his success were commitment and passion.



Further, I would like to give you my priorities and focus for my tenure:

1. Increased visibility of APIO through participation with NRCS leadership.
2. Teamwork of APIO Council and accountability
3. Increased outreach to students and members.

This past summer, the 11th Annual Training Conference was held in Sacramento, California in conjunction with the Federal Women's Emphasis Managers. As with our past conferences, this past year's conference was successful. The sponsorship provided by California NRCS leadership, specifically Ms. Gayle Norman, Acting State Conservationist, and staff, including Ms. Hue Dang, State Resource Conservationist, and their Civil Rights Committee was instrumental with the planning and arrangements for the conference tours, logistics, videotaping, and local and dignitary speakers and presenters.

*(continued on page 2)*

## NATIONAL DIVERSITY CONFERENCE SCHEDULED

Planning is well underway for the NRCS 2010 Joint Training Conference of the Professional Employee Organizations and Special Emphasis Program Managers. The Presidents of APIO, the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees (NOPBNRCSE), National Organization of Professional Hispanic NRCS Employees (NOPHNRCS), and the NRCS Civil Rights Division appreciate the opportunity to host this exciting and informative training conference. The training conference is March 15-19, 2010, in Kansas City, Missouri at the Downtown Marriott Hotel.

Two items need your immediate attention.

1. Nominations for the Asian Pacific Islander Farmer/Rancher Conservation Award need to be submitted by Feb. 1. Nominations must be submitted to your STC. The nomination form and judging criteria are posted on the APIO Web site.
2. Poster papers need to be submitted by January 30. Poster guidelines and registration form are posted on the APIO Web site.

*Mark your calendars now and plan to be there for this historic event!*

Furthermore, I would like to give kudos and appreciation for the APIO council and members and national leadership staff who contributed to the conference. I recommend that if you haven't already seen the conference summary report, go to our Web site and download a copy. The conference summary report provides session summary details for your reference that could be shared with your states because of the many invaluable agency technical and emerging issues covered during the conference.

This fall season closed out FY 2009, which turned out to be unusually busy and transitional time with the new administration, Farm Bill passage, OMB audit workload, and recession challenges. Subsequently, FY 2010 began with a great start with unprecedented early budget allocation letters to the States, along with Chief White's priorities (conservation implementation, cleaning house, and improving relations). I personally see promising changes currently happening within the agency and department with certain initiatives to improve our business processes in Workforce Planning, Recruitment and Retention, Mentorship Program, and the Leadership Development Program, to name a few. There is no better time than now to get involved with these initiatives and programs for professional development with detail opportunities, as well as to contribute and provide our diverse AAPI perspective and innovativeness. I encourage your participation with these opportunities.

Finally, I would like to mention the upcoming Joint Training Conference scheduled for March 15-19 in Kansas City, Missouri. This meeting will be jointly sponsored and organized with our fellow employee organizations including the NOPBNRCSE, NOPHENRCSE, the Office of Civil Rights, and Special Emphasis Program Managers (including FWP, Disability, and Veterans). I recommended that you consider attending this unique and diverse conference, and encourage you to register and make hotel reservations by the deadline of January 30, 2010. We will be posting Conference information on our APIO Web site. The following highlights will be part of this year's conference specific to APIO activities:

1. APIO Business Meeting
2. Joint Employee Organization Executive Board Meeting
3. AAPI Farmer of the Year Award
4. APIO Student Award and Auction
5. APIO Awards Luncheon
6. Poster Exhibit – APIO/AAPI

In closing, I want to extend my appreciation to the committee chairs involved in FY 2010 Training Conference and look forward to seeing all of our members at the conference. If you have any questions and concerns for the APIO, please contact me or your Regional Representative. Happy New Year!

*Pete*

## Biggs Assumes Leadership Role in Illinois

*by Manny Wei, Illinois*

Angela Biggs is the newest API to become a member of the NRCS leadership team. In November 2009, Angela was selected as the Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in Illinois.

She will be in charge of 23 counties in the East Central portion of Illinois. APIO would like to congratulate Angela and wish her the best of luck.

Congratulations, Angela!



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## You can't go wrong when you talk about *manure*...

*by Jim Eikenberry, Vermont*

How do you keep 170 college freshmen natural resources students engaged in a presentation about the NRCS and Civil Rights?

I wasn't sure at first and I had a hunch that it would be a little bit harder than getting fourth graders excited about manure. (This is my standard presentation age group these days.) I decided that you just can't go wrong with manure, so I started off with a slide of one of the worst livestock-related resource concerns you can imagine. It got their attention.

From there I gave them an overview of what NRCS does and how Civil Rights issues are integrated into all aspects of our work. They were especially interested in the real life stories of fellow employees and customers who have dealt with and overcome discrimination. The Pigford vs. Glickman lawsuit and the Basu Settlement especially got their attention.

I was honest with them that discrimination is still a problem, but that the NRCS seeks to actively serve all of our customers and to recruit and retain a diverse workforce. They were excited to know that NRCS expects a lot of job openings due to retirements, and several of them have even applied for NRCS internships for next summer.

Hopefully this talk will lead to more interest and awareness of NRCS and greater diversity in our future workforce.

# APIO and NRCS Help Islanders Recover from Tsunami and Earthquake on American Samoa

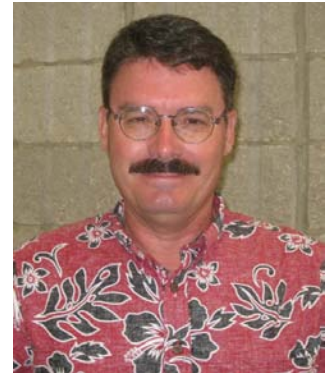
*by Cheryl Morton, Hawaii*

On September 29, 2009, a Tsunami hit American Samoa after a massive 8.3 earthquake. Being only a quarter of a mile inland from Pago Pago Harbor, the USDA service center was in direct line for the destructive forces of the Tsunami, and many of our co-workers were either at work or on their way to work.

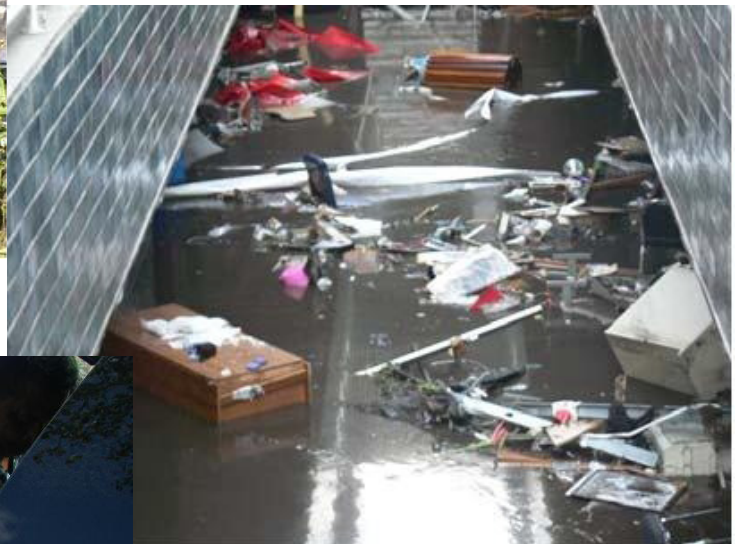
State Conservation Engineer William S. Hollingsworth (right) departed Honolulu on Sunday, October 4th, to assist with the EWP damage assessment, photo documentation, and temporary office operations. He arrived in American Samoa with three duffel bags (70 pounds each), filled with personal hygiene items (soap, shampoo, toothpaste, and other toiletries). Together with District Conservationist John Womack, Soil Conservationist Sarah Tanuvasa, and Pele Iuta of the Soil & Water Conservation District, they distributed the items to the Nua-Seetaga Community, based on Iuta's recommendation.

Upon his return to Honolulu, Bill Hollingsworth was reimbursed the \$500 from the Asian Pacific Islander Organization, the 501(c)3 non-profit group of NRCS employees.

Bill joined the NRCS on January 6, 2008 as the State Conservation Engineer for the Pacific Islands Area after serving 20 years with the Army. He is married with six children and lives in Aiea, HI.



Photos taken near the USDA Service Center (left and below) show the destruction caused by the Tsunami and earthquake.



Toiletries were distributed to the residents, thanks to the efforts of NRCS and District employees, and APIO.

# Ag-Related Water Issues and The Sacramento River Delta Loop of California

by Yuri Plowden, Pennsylvania

As Pennsylvania's Asian American Pacific Islander Special Emphasis Program Manager, I had the opportunity to attend the Asian Pacific Islander Organization/Federal Women's Program National Training Conference in Sacramento, California this past August. One highlight of the conference was a tour of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, a rich agricultural region that relies on a complex levee system built around the turn of the last century.

The heart of the Delta is the confluence of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers which provide a steady flow of fresh water from the mountains into the valley and eventually empty into San Francisco Bay. The climate is Mediterranean, meaning hot dry summer days, cool nights, and cold rainy winters. Rainfall is 12 to 21 inches. The Delta encompasses about 1,100 square miles with 1,100 miles of levees and thousands of miles of waterways. Because it used to be marshland, the Delta's soils are high in organic matter and are underlain by a heterogenous mix of alluvial sediments.



The Sacramento River is confined with a 150-year-old levee system built largely by immigrants from southern China.

The Delta's original inhabitants were the Maidu Indians, followed by Spanish explorers, gold diggers, and then settlers. The settlers found the soils to be rich and productive provided they could prevent the regular spring and winter floods. In the mid 1800's, an influx of Chinese immigrants began building an extensive levee system using wheelbarrows of peat. Eventually clamshell dredge material replaced the peat and, by 1930, the levees and drainage systems were completed and continue to be in use today.

With subsequent tillage, however, much of the original organic matter has oxidized away leading to significant subsidence of the drained areas.

This is putting more and more stress on the old levees as, meanwhile,

urbanization and development pressures continue. On the tour, I often observed the river being held in by the levees on one side of the road and cropland 25 feet or lower on the other side.

The Delta region is at the heart of a massive north-to-south water delivery system. Freshwater is transported from the Delta through two huge pumping stations for use in central and southern California. It is estimated that two-thirds of California's population, much of which lives hundreds of miles away as far south as Los Angeles, gets at least part of its drinking water from the region. The levees help to protect the water export facilities from salt water intrusion.



From time to time, the levees fail resulting in a breach. Apparently much of the levee system is privately owned so it is up to individual landowners or local districts to maintain the integrity of levees on their property. The Delta is situated close to the very geologically active San Francisco area, so an earthquake could lead to catastrophic failure of the levees resulting in billions of dollars of crop damage and perhaps loss of life.

As part of the tour, we visited third generation Chinese-American Bartlett pear farmer Wally Chan (*left*), sampled fresh melons from a profitable u-pick farm, tasted a variety of wines brewed from grapes grown sustainably in the Lodi region, visited the historic Chinese immigrant town of Locke, and learned about California's Department of Water Resources efforts to monitor the carbon sequestration abilities of rice as a way of reversing the continual subsidence of organic matter in Delta soils.

The weather that day was hot, dry, and windy. Silt and dust blew into our eyes as our NRCS tour guide, Lisa Hokholt, explained how air quality in the region is directly related to soil conservation. The economic importance of agriculture in the Delta was obvious as was the fragility of its flood control system, and the tenacity of its inhabitants. I'm glad I had the opportunity to learn first hand about this fascinating and vital region.

*Information and photos compiled with assistance from Lisa A. Hokholt, NRCS, California*