

Welcome

Christine Birdsong, California Department of Food & Agriculture Undersecretary
Carlos Suarez, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist - California



Christine Birdsong was appointed by Governor Newsom as Undersecretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. Previously, she was Senior Vice President, General Counsel and Director of People and Culture for the Sun Valley Rice Company. She has also served as General Counsel for the National Cotton Council of America, Counsel for the Committee on Agriculture for the United States House of Representatives and Federal Government Affairs Leader for CropLife America. She earned a Juris Doctor degree from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, and is a UC Berkeley alumni.



Carlos Suarez has been the State Conservationist for 11 years (6 yrs. California, 5 yrs. Florida) and has 28 years with NRCS.

He began his career with NRCS in the summer of 1990 as a student trainee in Puerto Rico. He has extensive experience serving in a number of technical and leadership positions, domestically and internationally, including serving in the following capacities:

- State Conservationist in Florida
- Deputy State Conservationist in Nebraska and California
- Assistant State Conservationist for Field Operations in Wisconsin
- Watershed Advisor for the U.S. Embassy and U.S. Agency for International Development in Nicaragua
- Farm Bill Program Manager in Indiana
- Soil Conservationist and District Conservationist in West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

He also temporarily held two USDA-level positions: Acting Director for the Pacific Islands Area and the Acting Director for the Stewardship and Community Development Division at USDA Headquarters.

From October 2017 – August 2018, he served as the lead post-hurricane assistance coordinator to Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands representing USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue. He was the head liaison between USDA and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as well as with multiple agencies and cabinet members of PR and USVI. USDA provided multi-faceted assistance to the island on issues as diverse as erosion control, watershed restoration, rural development, disaster assistance to farmers, nutrition, and more.

He has been a member of numerous national-level teams and has served on multiple occasions as an international environmental consultant to the U.S. Agency for International Development and The Millennium Challenge Corporation. He has represented USDA on various international mission trips to The Netherlands, Israel, Australia and Mexico providing his expertise on water conservation and water quality. In 2009, he served as Acting Deputy Country Director for the U.S. Agency for International Development at the U. S. Embassy in Mexico.

A native of San Juan, Puerto Rico, he holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Mechanization (Engineering) Technology from the University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez, a Master of Science degree in Geoenvironmental Studies from Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania and a Graduate Certificate in Public Policy and Leadership from American University in Washington, D.C. He received his SES certification in 2010 through the OPM Senior Executive Service (SES) Candidate Development Program.