



#FridaysOnTheFarm: Knowledge is Key

Each Friday meet farmers, producers, and landowners through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Visit local farms, ranches, forests, and resource areas where USDA customers and partners *do right and feed everyone*.

Meet Salvador Prieto and Martha Romero, owners of a 20-acre lemon and avocado orchard in Somis, California. Salvador's interest in farming began as a young boy growing up on a small farm in Mexico. Now farm owners, Salvador and Martha focus on conservation and farm profitability as they take steps to improve their operation.

Farming Experience

Salvador grew up watching and helping his father grow corn and beans on a small farm in Mexico. Martha grew up as a city girl in the heart of Los Angeles. Now, they share a farm and orchard with their two children.

Salvador's love for music is originally what brought him to the United States. But once here, he had a calling to return to the farming life he remembered in Mexico. As a producer and promoter in his spare time, Salvador keeps his passion for music alive by helping other musicians succeed. He's also passionate about the success of his operation.

Knowledge is Key

Martha says knowledge is the key to managing a farm successfully. "Before we plant further, we need to educate ourselves on how to do it best."

"From the planting of a seed or a tree, we need the entire process to be profitable," said Martha. "It's not just about planting it. It's about preparing the land and using the resources wisely."

Salvador discovered the local Farm Bureau and the Ventura County Agricultural Irrigated Land Group coalition. They put the farmers in touch with agencies that offer technical and financial assistance to implement conservation and management practices—[USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) and the Ventura Resource Conservation District.

NRCS California District Conservationist Dawn Afman, Soil Conservationist Elizabeth Keith, and Resource Conservationist Brooks Engelhardt, have all provided technical assistance and invested their time and expertise in helping Salvador and Martha incorporate conservation practices in their orchard.



“At first it was overwhelming, but many other farmers I know are members, so it is comforting to know that I am not alone,” said Martha. “We need to make a profit, obviously, but, for me, I want to do it while protecting mother nature and precious resources like water. I can do this with NRCS’ help.”

Custom Practices

The have learned a lot from trial and error. Martha admits that she even bought her trees before the land was ready. But learning opportunities like conservation workshops gave them critical knowledge and experience to succeed.

The first conservation practice they learned was mulching to save water and reduce weeds. Salvador and Martha, with help through NRCS’ [Environmental Quality Incentives Program](#), applied mulch to their orchard floor to conserve soil moisture and improve soil health in the Fall of 2018.

“Every time we have a question or need assistance, NRCS has been nothing but helpful,” said Martha. “They let us know about other programs out in the community and invited us to their annual Latino Farmer Conference, where my husband and I learned about other helpful resources.”

Continuous Improvements

The newest conservation practice on the orchard is Irrigation Water Management. The plan includes installing moisture sensors into the ground, which transmit continuous data to cloud-based storage. This information can then be accessed through an app on their phones, letting them know when, where and how long to irrigate—helping them toward a goal of producing 6,000 pounds of produce per acre.

Martha and Salvador are always looking for ways to improve their family’s avocado and lemon orchard. She attributes their success to support from the family and assistance from conservation agencies.

Martha just wants to enjoy the beauty of the orchards knowing her family is helping the farm be better tomorrow than it was today.

More Information

USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster assistance, loan, and conservation programs to help agricultural producers in the United States weather ups and downs in the



market and recover from natural disasters as well as invest in improvements to their operations. [Learn about additional programs.](#)

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