

# USDA-NRCS Helps People to Help the Land

## “Bare Soil is Bad! Protect it, cover it, or lose it.”

By **BILL JAYNES**  
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(*Pohnpei, FSM*) - Brie Darr, currently stationed in the FSM and Scott Crockett stationed in Saipan have multiple missions but on the day that we spoke their message was united along one line, “Bare Soil is Bad! Protect it, cover it, or lose it.” They are both employees of the US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The NRCS says that it works to help people help the land.

Crockett is related to the American legend Davey Crockett. That relationship conjured in my mind picturesque images of farming as I knew about it in the US.

The tiller tills the open field in the open air. He exposes the top soil to the elements and labors on. He has history to back him in his labors. His ancestors planted and harvested in the same way and his great grandchildren will likely continue to do the same long after he is gone.

The tools he uses have changed. Gone is the drudgery of plowing furrows with mule drawn plows. The present day plowman is part of a well oiled machine and he is capable of daily plowing furrows across acres and acres of land sometimes while sitting in air conditioned comfort until the job is done. If his descendents rotate crops on

their land and systematically leave fields uncultivated in order to preserve the life giving soil, the land will be fertile forever.

“It takes about a hundred years to build up one inch of top soil,” Darr said, “and the top soil is where all of the plants get their nutrients.”

Crockett said, “Tropical environments have very specific requirements that are very different from mainland agriculture. You can’t apply mainland, lower 48 types of practices to the island.”

Darr interjected, “With all of the rain we get here in Pohnpei and all of the erosion, it [the topsoil] washes off and we really want to be sure that people take care of their land and their soil...”

Pohnpei experiences on average, nearly two hundred inches of rain fall per year and all of it falls on land that slopes toward the ocean. Unprotected topsoil exposed to that type of an onslaught is doomed to slough off into the ocean

Darr and Crockett recently conducted several training sessions as NRCS often does in the FSM without fanfare. Crockett said that in addition to a series of Forum Lectures sponsored by the College of Micronesia and the FSM Embassy, they also conducted contour farming training which helps tractor op-

erators and land owners to understand the problem of topsoil erosion and proper planning for plowing if they can’t be talked out of doing it at all.

Crockett said that nearly anything can be grown in the forests of Micronesia but not in the same way as they are grown in less rainy areas and the forest itself helps to protect against erosion of the top soil. Even varieties of tomatoes can be

grown in the forests with the right type of planning. Anyone who has tried to grow tomatoes in Pohnpei knows how difficult they are to grow because of their growth cycle. The NRCS helps train farmers to do it without endangering the top soil and protecting their farm land for future generations.

“Remember,” they say as they leave the K-Press office, “bare soil is bad! Protect it, cover it, or lose it.”