Local college student begins working for USDA in El Centro office  
By ROMAN FLORES, Staff Writer  
Friday, July 9, 2010 8:16 AM PDT

From local farming to working for the government, El Centro’s Edgar Ortega is poised to enter the big leagues right out of college.

The incoming senior at San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus has been working for the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Regional Development office in El Centro since early June.

Ortega’s professional journey “was really a roller coaster,” he said, crediting Roberto Gonzalez Jr., the USDA-Hispanic Service Institute regional director and former SDSU-IV counselor, and Imperial Valley College’s Joe Espinoza for helping him along the way.

“In October 2009, Edgar Ortega was sponsored by the USDA-Hispanic Serving Institutions National Program office as a USDA-HIS Student Conference Scholar,” Gonzalez said.

He said the annual conference, put on in Orlando, Fla., by the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, enabled Ortega to “participate in interactive workshops on education, career, cultural, leadership, employment and public service.”

“It was at the national conference that Edgar had the opportunity to meet Victor Vasquez, deputy under secretary for rural development at the USDA, who was one of the contributing keynote speakers,” Gonzalez said. “Edgar was inspired by his motivational speech in how USDA-RD is helping rural communities create prosperity (among other services and positive outcomes),” he said.

From there, Gonzalez introduced Ortega to the Student Temporary Employment Program that was available in the USDA-RD El Centro Service Center “and we immediately started working on the résumé and application process and preparing for the interview with the area director and area specialist,” Gonzalez said.

Ortega works as an area assistant who specializes in aiding local, low-income single families receive loans to “get them on their feet,” he said.

“My main goal was always to make a difference in the public because I feel there’s always something you can do to change your community,” Ortega said. “I feel that, at least with these programs, I’m helping out those that I can in the community.

“It was an opportunity I took to the max,” Ortega said.

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