

Gary Mast Visits Islands

by Scott Crockett and John Bart Lawrence

The Pacific Islands West Area received a number of special visits from mainland partners in October 2007. Gary Mast, Deputy Undersecretary for the US Department of Agriculture spent important time meeting with the newly elected Guam Soil and Water Conservation District directors and SWCD staff. In addition, Mr. Mast along with Mr. and Mrs. Olin Sims (see related note on page six) and Guam SWCD directors, Roland Quitigua and Benny San Nicolas toured Navy and Air Force military installations. It was at the Andersen Air Force Base USDA snake lab where Mr. Mast become only the second USDA employee recognized by NRCS in the Pacific Islands Area as an official “brown tree snake wrangler.”

In addition to attending the Pacific Basin Association of Conservation District and Guam Soil and Water Conservation District meetings on Guam, Mr. Mast along with Larry Yamamoto and Soil Scientist Bob Gavenda, traveled to Palau to review unique tropical agricultural and conservation areas on the island of Babeldaup. The august USDA and NRCS team was met there by acting Resource Conservationist, Scott Crockett. Representatives from Palau included the Minister of Resources and Development, Fritz Koshiha and the Palau Director of Agriculture, Fred Sengebau.

The USDA and Palau contingencies visited several NRCS cooperating farms, a newly established conservation area, a demonstration farm, the national Coral Reef Center, and a newly constructed aquaculture operation. Minister Koshiha helped to organize the site visits while Bob Gavenda and Fred Sengebau provided technical details for each stop. One of the highlights of the trip was a boat ride through the beautiful Rock Islands, during which the Undersecretary was able to visit a unique cultural and natural resource, Jellyfish Lake. Minister Koshiha and his staff were gracious hosts, going to great lengths to provide a diplomatic reception for the visiting USDA officials, as well as providing a memorable lunch each day. The Undersecretary's visit underscored the important partnership NRCS has with our ROP partners and helped to foster a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities of supporting the NRCS conservation mission in the remote western Pacific islands of Micronesia.



Gary Mast, Deputy Under Secretary for USDA's Natural Resources and Environment holds a brown tree snake in Guam.

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L to R: Bob Gavenda, Fritz Koshiha, Fred Sengebau, Larry Yamamoto, and Gary Mast.

Season's Greetings from the PIA Director



Current Developments is a newsletter for employees and partners. You may submit articles and photos to:

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With the new year already upon us, I know we can look forward to a very dynamic 2008. Now that the U.S. Congress and the President have agreed upon a budget for Fiscal Year 2008, we must move forward to implement that budget and we will again need to live with reduced funding levels. Also, we can expect to have a new Farm Bill sometime in 2008. This major legislative action will undoubtedly mean changes to the programs we are currently working with. But despite these changes, many things will remain the same. So as we get ready for the changes that we know will come, let's focus on what we know we will need to do regardless of what happens with the new Farm Bill and because of reduced funding levels.

Once again in 2008, one of the most visible changes we will see is the number of new faces. Due to changes in NRCS return rights policy and for personal reasons, some of our Pacific Islands NRCS family will continue to seek other opportunities. Many of these people are going on to promotions and we want to wish them well. We will miss them but let us all work together to grow as a family. Let's find our new comfort zones and meet the challenges of growing and learning.

However, the single most important task at hand is the implementation of the conservation practices in the Farm Bill program contracts that we already have in place. Since the 2002 Farm Bill and the Regional Equity provisions that was a part of it, we have obligated a record amount of money to assist with the installation of conservation practices. You all did a tremendous job developing those contracts with our clients. Now, however, we are faced with the really important task of helping our clients implement those contracts.

The contracts we signed are promises we made to our clients and the U.S. Congress for the implementation of conservation practices on the land. Our job now is to follow up to help our clients implement these conservation practices. Doing this will also help us meet the implementation goals of our programs. Let us all work to insure that we meet those commitments. Let us all focus on our task of "Helping People Help the Land."

Finally I would like to thank all of you who are working to help support the Conservation Partnerships we have with various agencies, groups and organizations. These partnerships with our local government entities, our communities, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, nonprofit groups and individuals are still the cornerstone of how we do business. Let's continue to work with all of them as we set our natural resource program priorities, identify needs in the community, and equitably deliver the services Congress has charged us to deliver. Let us never forget that our work helps to protect our fragile islands and helps our communities sustain themselves for the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lawrence T. Yamamoto". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Lawrence T. Yamamoto, Director

Pac Rim RC&D Conference Held

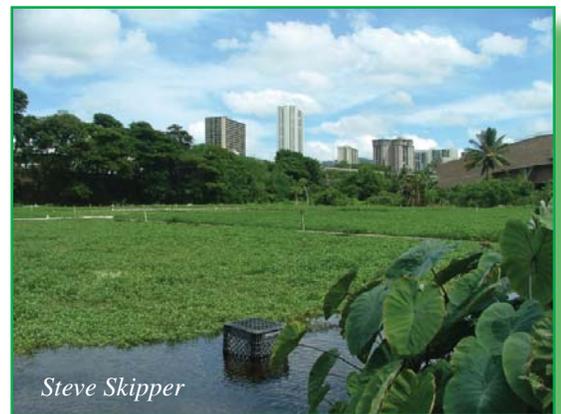
Every other year, the Pacific Rim Association of Resource Conservation & Development Council's Annual Conference is held in Hawai'i. This year's conference was held from November 6th to 8th at the Makaha Resort on the Leeward Coast of O'ahu. Over 65 enthusiastic RC&D Council Members, Staff, and NRCS employees attended the conference. There were representatives from Alaska, California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Hawai'i, American Samoa, and the Marianas Islands.

This year's conference theme was "Sustaining our Lands, Our People, and Our Culture." The first day of the conference included a keynote speech from Senator Russell Kokubun on the Hawai'i 2050 Sustainability Plan. After this the attendees went into two separate groups for two bus tours, Tour #1 – Ahupua'a & Hawaiian Culture led by Karen Ah Mai, the O'ahu RC&D's Board Treasurer, and Tour #2 – O'ahu Agriculture led by John McHugh, O'ahu RC&D Member.

Day two of the conference consisted of many training options for the participants, including "Sustainability of RC&D's" with a panel of guest speakers, "Area Planning," "Direct/Indirect Costs," "Harvesting Energy from the Land," and "Hawaii's Climate Challenge." This was followed with Success Stories presentations from various RC&D council representatives. The day was completed with a luau with a Keiki Halau and music presented by the Ka'unoe Foundation, and an auction to benefit the PacRim Association of RC&D's.



Oahu RC&D at Registration: Matt Johnson, JoAnn Connolly, and Cynthia Rezentes.



Steve Skipper

Watercress Farm: Agriculture Tour led by Jon McHugh.

Wiliwili Lowland Dry Forest Restoration at Waikoloa Village

by Matt Wung, Waimea District Conservationist

The Waikoloa Village Outdoor Circle is in the process of leading a community-based effort to restore the Wiliwili lowland dry forest and build self-sustaining populations of six endangered plant species through the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program.

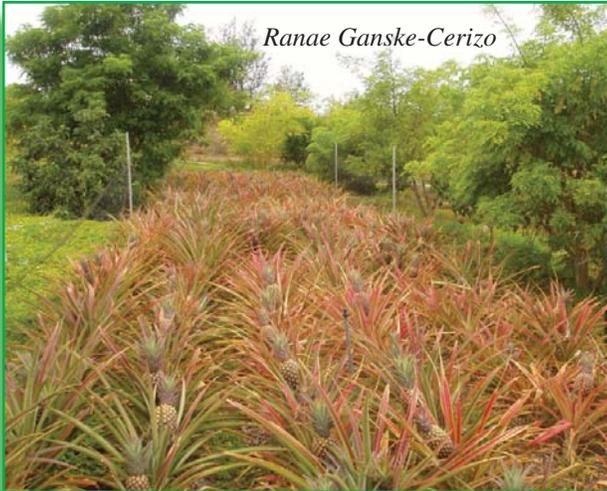
Management measures include limiting the effects of fountain grass, fire, feral goats, rats, gall wasp, twig borer, and bruchid beetle infestations. The first phase of this project is to install 13,400 feet of fencing, establish a rodent control program, maintain and expand fountain grass removal around native trees and fence boundary, and initiate monitoring and educational objectives. The second phase will be establishing a water system to support future plantings, restore native forest through seeding and planting common natives, interplant rare and endangered species and to monitor, research, evaluate and revise management approach as appropriate.

The six endangered plants to perpetuate are: Ko'oloa'ula (*Abutilon menziesii*), Uhiuhi (*Caesalpinia kawaiense*), mao hou hele (*Hibiscus backenridgei*), Kokio (*Kokia drynarioides*), halapepe (*Pleomele hawaiiense*), and (*Vigna 0-wahuensis*).



Margaret Becka and John Pipan study the Uhiuhi plant.

Employee Spotlight



Carbon Sequestration on Maui

by Gerry Ross, Kupa'a Farm

At Kupa'a Farm, a four acre organic farm on Maui, we make extensive use of annual and perennial nitrogen fixing plants. In addition to serving a range of direct agricultural purposes (shade for coffee, wind breaks, mulch source, nutrition) these plants also serve to store carbon and hence reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide through biologic sequestration. Nitrogen fixing trees such as Calliandra, Gliricidia, Inga, and native Acacia (koa) provide shade and protection for orchard crops such as coffee and tropical fruit and also enrich the soil organic matter content through cyclical leaf drop and direct nitrogen fixation in the rhizosphere.

When combined with a perennial ground cover such as *Arachis pintoi* the orchards become vibrant environments for fixing of carbon and nitrogen. Annual cover crops include N-fixers such as sunn hemp as well as grasses (sudan grass, Japanese millet, annual rye, barley and oats) and broad leaves (buckwheat and mustard). Most of these cover crops can be killed by mowing without the need for tillage incorporation leaving rich cover mulch that can be used for direct seeding or planting (for example pumpkins planted into standing dead barley-vetch covers). Although each of these processes does return some of the fixed C back to the atmosphere during biologic degradation the net increase in soil OM and the increased standing biomass serves to decrease atmospheric carbon dioxide.



Jackie Flores,
Area Resource Conservationist, Guam

Jackie Flores demonstrates an outstanding commitment to and understanding of the NRCS Farm Bill programs and complex Endangered Species Act (ESA) workload in the Pacific Islands West Area. With sparse heritage or legacy database information to support the development of ESA Section 7 letters for the Marianas (Guam and the CNMI), Jackie diligently and expertly applies her extensive technical knowledge, experience and local awareness to support this critical agency task. The diversity of tropical cropping systems and land owner objectives together with a the variable tropical soils, water and wildlife resource concerns (i.e. coral reef, nesting sea turtle, native and pollinators, fruit bats, endangered birds, etc.) all represent some of the most complex and least understood habitats in the American Pacific.

As we all know on team NRCS, no single employee does it all. And, Jackie understands this too. She works independently and diligently with other Pacific Island specialists and NRCS conservation partners to help her to gain new knowledge and experience. Jackie is a rising young star in our Agency. Her focus and dedication to her work supporting the NRCS conservation in the western Pacific is outstanding. Her drive to achieve and support excellence in the development and review of Pacific Islands Area planning support documents in support of the Agency mission, "helping people help the land" is paralleled only by her passion and love for her island home, Islas Marianas. She is an Outstanding NRCS Conservationist with eight years of service!

Focus on the Field: Palau

This past September I had the opportunity to work in Palau for a 30 day detail. The tasks assigned to me by Bart Lawrence were fairly simple; deliver previously developed conservation plans, hand out NRCS posters and pens and complete whatever year end reporting possible. In working on these tasks the first week, many Palauans asked, "Who NRCS was and what were did". In an effort to improve Palau's knowledge of USDA activities, I had the opportunity to assist Bart in outreach efforts. Letters were written to the 16 State Governor's informing them of USDA's role in Palau. Scott Crockett and I completed a 40 minute TV talk show on the role of USDA in Palau and a conservation plan was completed for the US Embassy under construction. I found Palau to be grateful for our presence and hungry for what USDA has to offer.

--by Jeff Knowles

For two days in October, the Pacific island nation of the Republic of Palau played host to a distinguished visitor from the US Department of Agriculture. Gary Mast, Deputy Undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment, joined Larry Yamamoto, Director of Pacific Islands NRCS, Dr. Bob Gavenda, West Area Soil Scientist, and Scott Crockett, Acting Resource Conservationist, on a whirlwind tour of the small but ecologically rich country. (See the cover story on the Undersecretary's visit.) The purpose of the Undersecretary's visit was to become familiar with the challenges and opportunities present in the NRCS Koror Field Office service area, and to demonstrate the USDA's continued commitment to providing technical assistance to Palau through various agencies.

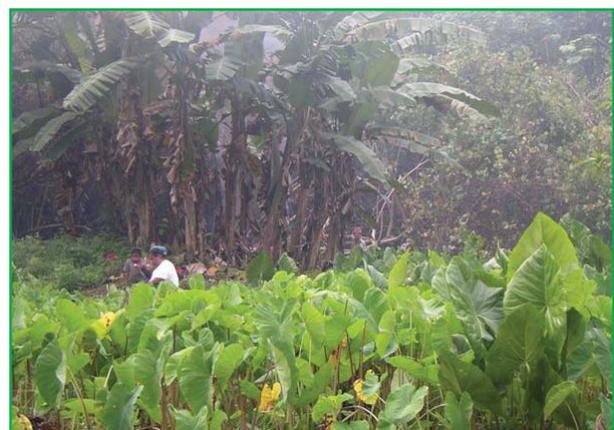
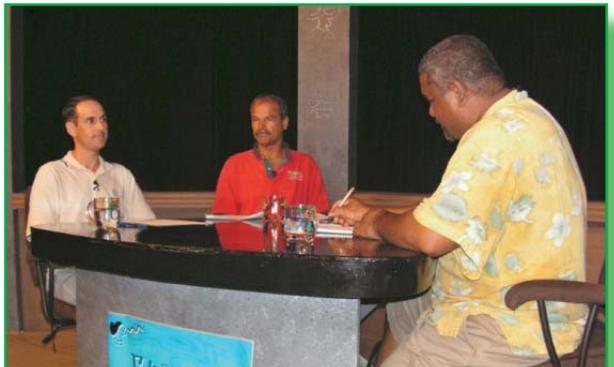
--by Scott Crockett

There were many highlights during my detail to Palau, including working with the Vice President, Governors and new partnerships developed with many government resource managers. However, if I had to choose one top highlight, it would be working with the producers. Financial incentive programs were not available so all I had to offer was technical assistance. The farmers were very grateful for the field visits and the sharing of my insights and experiences that were intended to aid their resources and contribute to the economic viability of their agricultural enterprise. The photo to the right is of Doctor Ueki whose organic farm serves as a role model of successful Multi-Story Cropping. While learning much from him, I was able to suggest several Cover Crop recommendations which he will be incorporating into his farming strategy.

--by Lex Riggle

I discovered farming on Palau is characterized by communal planting, women farmers, and individual cultivation. Women attend to the farming on Palau. Most of the food is raised by individual families and farming is occasionally done without the help of others in the community. The land is usually worked by a group of women from a community to come together for this purpose. The main food cultivated is taro with other foods such as sweet potato, tapioca, bananas and breadfruit being an important part of the diet. The photo to the right depicts a family from Ngiwal Sate that I worked with during my detail. They are preparing agricultural commodities for delivery to the Yanos market in Koror. While on Palau I had the opportunity to work with several government agencies and agriculture producers. They are very receptive to the NRCS technical assistance we provide.

--by Ranae Ganske-Cerizo





District Conservationist, Scott Crockett (left), presents Saipan farmer, Ramon Camacho, with a token of appreciation for being an outstanding partner in conservation. Photo by: Martin Naputi.

Saipan farmer, Ramon B. Camacho, recently applied the final best management practice of a conservation plan developed for his Kagman farm with assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Saipan & Northern Islands Soil and Water Conservation District (S&NI SWCD). Mr. Camacho is the first Saipan farmer to complete his conservation plan, one of many similar farm and ranch plans being applied within the CNMI.

Camacho knows the value of conservation. He has seen the improvement in the quality of the soil on his farm in the years since he began following his NRCS approved conservation plan. Practices such as mulching, cover crop, crop rotation, nutrient management and pest management protect the soil from erosion, reduce the amount of chemicals he needs to apply, reduce the amount of irrigation water his plants require, and improve his overall farm productivity. All those benefits add up to more money in Camacho's pocket. Of course, they also result in a cleaner, healthier environment.

As a former member of the S&NI SWCD, Camacho has become an outspoken advocate for conservation. "I can see the value of conservation on my farm", says Camacho. "I'm telling all the other farmers to work with NRCS." His passion for sustainable farming has led Camacho to host several visitor's to his farm who stop by to admire his efforts, including groups of school children who desire to learn more about environmentally friendly agriculture.

Personnel Update

Incoming:

Bill Hollingsworth, State Conservation Engineer, SO
 Tony Ingersoll, State Agronomist, SO
 Dennis Kimberlin, Asst. Director Programs, SO
 Michael Robotham, Asst. Director Soil Science, SO
 Joe Toquero, Soil Conservationist, Guam FO
 Eileen Winkle, Human Resources Officer, SO
 Shirley Yamaguchi, Contracting Officer, SO

Outgoing:

James Eller, Soil Conservationist, Kealakekua, HI
 Jeff Knutson, District Conservationist, Hoolehua, HI
 Petra Sumter, Secretary, Honolulu, HI
 Jerry Williams, Soil Conservationist, Kamuela, HI

In Loving Memory



NACD President Olin Sims died unexpectedly in an accident on his ranch in McFadden, Wyoming. Sims was a trusted friend and colleague to many. He truly loved the land and was committed to the work of conservation districts. Our sincere condolences to the Sims family.

Landowners Workshop



In partnership with other agencies, Matt Wung, Jeff Knowles, Jerry Williams, and Gwen Gilbert gave presentations on the Farm Bill at a Land Owners workshop in October for Big Island residents.

Conservationist Awarded

Excerpts from "The Garden Island" newspaper



Greg Williams, representing Kauai Coffee Co., was the recipient of one of two water conservation awards presented by the Kaua'i Soil & Water Conservation Districts.

Peter Tausend of West Kaua'i Soil Conservation said this award demonstrates good stewardship of not only the land, but of its resources as well.

Kauai Coffee Co. was selected as the winner of the West Kaua'i award as Water Conservationist of the year. On the Eastside, Bob Farias Jr. of the Farias Cattle Co. was selected as the recipient for this year's award.

Ted Inouye of the East Kaua'i Soil & Water Conservation District said Farias, who describes himself as a "grass farmer" trying to raise cattle, was selected for his work converting idle cane lands to productive pastures through a system of grass and grazing management practices.

Inouye added that the Farias Cattle Co. is located at the tail end of the East Kaua'i Water Users Co-op Irrigation System, and Farias and his staff also maintain the portion that runs through the ranch.

"They have taken care of water to ensure that there is quality water for future generations," Inouye said.

Each year the East and West Soil & Water Conservation Districts recognize a farmer or rancher who is committed to instilling conservation practices to reduce non-point source pollution, improve soil and water quality in their watershed, and ensure delivery of quality drinking water for future generations, said Alan Muraoka of the Soil & Water Conservation Districts in a short presentation at the Department of Water offices in Pua Loke.

RC&D Corner: Oahu

by Matthew Johnson, Project Coordinator



Left to right: Director Tom Berg; Operations Manager Matt Johnson; Watershed Coordinator Colette Cortez; and Iwalani Sato from the City & County of Honolulu's Storm Water Quality Branch.

In partnership with the City and County of Honolulu's Environmental Services Division Storm Water Quality Branch, the Oahu RC&D participated in the Kapakahi Stream Clean Up in October 2007. Volunteers helped to remove invasive plants, revegetate with native plants, and separate the burnables and recyclables. Thank you to everyone who volunteered!

*Happy New Year
&
All the Best in 2008!*

Photo Contest Winners



Congratulations to Greg Koob, Bart Lawrence, and Steve Skipper for being this round of photo contest winners! For the Conservation category, we had eleven nominations. For the Cultural category, we had six nominations, and for the Scenic category, we had eight nominations. The Leadership Team based their judging on Appropriateness to Category, Composition, Creativity, and Aesthetics.

The winner for the Conservation category is Greg Koob, State Biologist in the Honolulu State Office. His picture is of extreme fencing in the Honouliuli Preserve on Oahu.

The winner for the Cultural category is John Bart Lawrence, Assistant Director for Operations in the Guam Area Office. His picture is of the Lattestones in Rota.

The winner for the Scenic category is Steve Skipper, Big Island RC&D Coordinator. His picture is of the Hilo side of Hawaii.

Thank you to everyone who submitted photos for the contest. If you are interested in participating in the next contest, please email one JPEG or TIFF per category to jolene.lau@hi.usda.gov. The deadline to submit photos for the next issue of Current Developments is due on February 29, 2008.

The National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) is conducting their Ag Census data collection. Conducted every five years, the Census is a complete count of farms and ranches and the people who operate them. The Census looks at land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income and expenditures and other topics. It provides the only source of uniform, comprehensive agricultural data for every county in the nation.

NASS will mail out Census forms on December 28, 2007 to collect data for the 2007 calendar year. Completed forms are due by **February 4, 2008**. Producers can return their forms by mail or, for the first time, they have the convenient option of filling out the Census online via a secure web site.

