

Current Developments

PIA Welcomes New Director



Kohala Watershed Tour on the Big Island.



Visiting an EQIP project at Double J Livestock on Oahu.

Angel Figueroa was born in a small sugar cane-producing town in the Eastern Coast of Puerto Rico. After graduating from high school, Figueroa wanted to make a difference by doing his part in making food available to the growing world population. With this in mind, he attended and graduated from the University of Puerto Rico with a degree in Agronomy and Soils. He began his career with the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, first as an agriculture teacher and later as the Landscape Division Director in the South Central Region. He later served four years of active duty in the U.S. Army as a Russian Linguist in the Military Intelligence section.

Figueroa began his career with USDA in New England in 1989 where he worked for the Farmers Home Administration for two years. In 1990 he was recruited by the then Soil Conservation Service as a Soil Conservationist and worked in two different field offices. He later went to serve as District Conservationist in Massachusetts and Ohio. In 1997 he was promoted to Area Conservationist and later as Assistant State Conservationist in North Dakota where he served for 3 years. In 2000 Figueroa was selected to serve as liaison with the US military as a planner for military lands all over the United States. This also included a short tour to South Korea.

In 2002 Angel Figueroa went to the National Headquarters in Washington, DC to work at the Animal Husbandry and Clean Water Division. From 2004 to 2010 he served as National TSP Coordinator, and in 2010 he served as Conservation Initiatives Team Leader, both national leadership positions. In 2009 he was selected to serve as acting Associate Deputy Chief for Science and Technology, a leadership position he held for seven months. In 2010, Figueroa served as acting Director of the Caribbean Area for four months. The Chief announced his selection as PIA Director in July 2011. Angel moved to Oahu with his wife Ivette. Together they are the proud parents of two wonderful and beautiful daughters, Amy and Lynette.

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Mr. Angel Figueroa, PIA Director

Message from the PIA Director

All Employees in the Pacific Islands Area,

I have been your Director for about four months now; but I feel I have been with you much longer. I wish to thank all of you for welcoming me so well and for sharing your work day with me. I also want to thank those of you who sent me their profiles; and if you didn't that is understandable with our busy work schedules.

To begin with, I would like to share with all of you some of my plans. Being new to the Pacific Islands Area (PIA); I am currently in the middle of a couple of projects that I have deemed to be of the highest priority. As soon as is practical, I am aiming to visit every office and meet everyone. In these visits I would like to include our Partners. These visits have already begun and are ongoing. So far, they have been very informative for me, and hopefully for those that I have had the opportunity to meet. In these visits, I have been learning about the resource concerns that you are addressing and about our clients and partners.

My second project is to build a strong leadership team that exceeds expectations of performance and customer service. One more project in my scope that I would like to mention at this time is to improve communications in the PIA among our staff. Of course, I have many more projects and responsibilities that I will address in good time. So I would like to commit to you that I will not shy away from addressing each challenge that we face together.

That being said, I would like to challenge all of you to join me in this commitment; to produce the maximum service to our clients and to each other. I also expect you to understand that we are representatives of the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service for the Pacific Islands Area; and for all of us to get beyond past mergers and experiences. I have a deep respect for all of our differences, both culturally and logistically. You have my support and my trust and I hope to see you all soon.

Sincerely,

/s/

ANGEL L. FIGUEROA
Director
Pacific Islands Area

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

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Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Emphasis Program

Ben Vinhateiro, LGBT Special Emphasis Program Manager

I have been learning a lot in the last month about the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender (LGBT) Special Emphasis Program, and wanted to share with you an overview of the current efforts and issues that the program is addressing, both locally and nationwide. In the future I will be providing regular updates and information on current LGBT issues relating to the federal workplace, but for now I'd like to paint a broader picture of where we came from, where we are now, and where we would like to be.

The LGBT Special Emphasis Program (SEP) is the newest SEP, established by Secretary Vilsack on June 4th, 2009. Before signing the updated regulation establishing the new SEP at the annual LGBT Pride Event in Washington DC, the Secretary noted:

“We’re going to sign a document that is our collective commitment from the leadership of the Department down to every single employee that suggests that diversity, including gay and lesbian diversity, is going to be celebrated, going to be recognized, and going to be part of the USDA experience.”

Since then the program has gained incredible momentum, currently reaching a whopping 87% participation by states and centers, represented by 47 LGBT Special Emphasis Program Managers nationwide! The Secretary has been very supportive of this effort, and has shown it by vigorously promoting the USDA’s Cultural Transformation efforts, adding his voice to the "It Gets Better" campaign, and recently amending USDA’s Civil Rights Policy Statement to include gender expression and gender identity.

But, for the LGBT community and everyone at NRCS, there are still many more rows to be hoed! In fact, only now that involvement and support for the program is building are we even able to begin assessing the existing roadblocks and concerns, and start looking at ways to address them. A recent LGBT Barrier Analysis conducted nationally indicated three major issues at the forefront of our efforts to help make NRCS a safe, more diverse, and inclusive work environment for all. I will briefly outline them here, and plan to delve into these categories more deeply in my future correspondence to the PIA:

1. **Basic Workplace Safety and Awareness:** Intimidation and bullying can be a constant threat to LGBT individuals and those perceived as LGBT in the NRCS workplace, which makes it very difficult for anyone to feel comfortable voicing their concerns. To put it another way, if you don’t feel safe enough to discuss your rights as an employee without fear of reprisal or ridicule, how can we even begin to address the concerns? There are existing avenues to provide support and help promote safety in the workplace, including the Employee Assistance Program



and the EEO Complaint Process. We are also looking at new ways to develop open and accepting environments within our workplaces, like the “Safe Space” program that many other companies, universities, and institutions are already involved in.

2. **Recruitment of LGBT Employees and Clients:** Diversity of the workforce is a critical component of our effectiveness as an agency, and we need to ensure that our outreach efforts are reaching the whole spectrum of our population. For NRCS, that means identifying and targeting recruitment efforts to relevant LGBT groups both locally and nationally, and finding other ways to get the word out to the LGBT community that we are not only a great agency to work for, but that we provide a safe and inclusive work environment too. The same goes for client outreach. All NRCS employees can take an active role in this effort by providing program and employment outreach at PRIDE events, reaching out to potential job candidates, and helping to identify under-utilized recruitment areas.

3. **Evolution of Benefits for Domestic Partners:** Although we have made great strides in extending a number of benefits to domestic partners of federal employees, crucial benefits like healthcare coverage still remain unavailable. The private sector has caught on to the disadvantage this type of policy puts them in when recruiting top notch employees, but the federal government is still trying to figure out how to deal with this issue.

Again, these are the major areas that the LGBT Special Emphasis Program will be focusing on, both locally and nationally. NRCS PIA is unique in that we represent such a wide spectrum of cultures, customs, and geographic locations. Our laws and LGBT-related policies differ greatly too. As your LGBT program manager, I’ll be keeping you informed on these issues, and welcome any input, suggestions, and perspective you may have. If something has struck a chord and you’d like to learn more about it, let me know and I will incorporate it into future correspondence.

Employee Spotlight



*Paul Lake,
Resource Conservationist*

Paul Lake is the Resource Conservationist for the Pohn Umwpoampw Field Office in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Paul works to support NRCS conservation operations in the FSM for over two years. His service area covers four uniquely different yet similar FSM high island states, plus far flung atolls and includes the many atolls of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Geographically, this is the largest single NRCS service area in the nation!

Paul is doing outstanding work! The FSM post was his first major overseas adventure since his tour with the US Air Force, where he worked as a carpenter in Japan. Paul hit the ground in the FSM at full speed! On his first day he found housing, a vehicle and settled in to the special pace of FSM life and work! His on island boss is the US Ambassador to the FSM. Paul works daily with a diverse group of local and international agency partners and stakeholders to support the US Government's FSM mission! He is supported by two local FSM Staff, Gibson Santos and Rodasio Samuel! They are the mortar of the FSM NRCS Pohn Umwpoampw Field Office!

During his initial tour reviewing resource issues and settings on Pohnpei, Paul instantly recognized a critical issue; the large number of small-scale piggery operations and the poop and pee they generated! Pigs, and they grow them BIG in Pohnpei, are an important cultural tradition. The issue of managing their output is very important to ensure clean water, healthy coral reefs and lagoons for fisheries and to support an important cultural tradition!

Paul rapidly accessed the resource needs. He used his assessment and drew on experienced local, NRCS Area and State and Regional specialists to develop a plan. He found examples of similar assessments conducted for American Samoa most useful to guide and support recent efforts. On December 8, 2011, the first meeting with FSM government and NGO partners will be held that will establish the Pohnpei Piggery Committee. Building on the outstanding example from American Samoa, and the commitment and hard work of its members, it will be a sure success!!

Personnel Update

Incoming:

Angel Figueroa, Director, State Office
Michael Brady, Natural Resources Specialist, State Office

Outgoing:

Larry Yamamoto, retirement
Stephen Skipper, retirement
Matthew Chong, summer hire
Amy Gilliam, summer hire
Makalani Pina, summer hire
Jan Michael Reyes, summer hire
Laurie Ho, retirement
Patrick Niemeyer, resigned
Cherry Griffith, transfer to NOAA
Barbara Fossum, retirement
James Eller, transfer to Idaho

Recognition

Time Off Awards: Ben Vinhateiro, Aiea and Andrew Stout, Waimea.

Length of Service Awards:

25 Years Service: Matthew Wung, Waimea

30 Years of Service: Kathleen Dobler, State Office

*Thank you to the 47
Earth Team Volun-
teers in 13 PIA offices
that contributed 3,382
hours in FY2011!*

NOTICE TO HISPANIC AND/OR WOMEN FARMERS AND RANCHERS

COMPENSATION FOR CLAIMS OF DISCRIMINATION

If you believe that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) improperly denied farm loan benefits to you between 1981 and 2000 because you are Hispanic or because you are female, you may be eligible to apply for compensation. This means you may be eligible if:

- 1.** You sought a farm loan or farm-loan servicing during that period;
- 2.** The loan was denied, provided late, approved for a lesser amount than requested, approved with restrictive conditions, or USDA failed to provide an appropriate loan service; and
- 3.** You believe these actions were based on your being Hispanic or your being female.

In 2011, a claims administrator will begin mailing claims packages to those who have requested one through the Call Center or website. The claims package will have detailed information about the eligibility and claims process.

If you want to register your name to receive a claims package, access the Hispanic and Women Farmer and Rancher Call Center or website:

Call Center: 1-888-508-4429

Website: www.farmerclaims.gov

For guidance, you may contact a lawyer or other legal services provider in your community. **USDA cannot provide legal advice to you.**

If you are currently represented by counsel regarding allegations of discrimination or in a lawsuit claiming discrimination, you should contact your counsel regarding this claims process.

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June 2011



Student Conservation Association

by Alberto Moravia, State Office, Honolulu



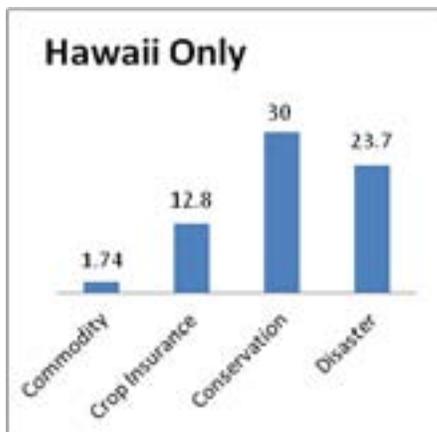
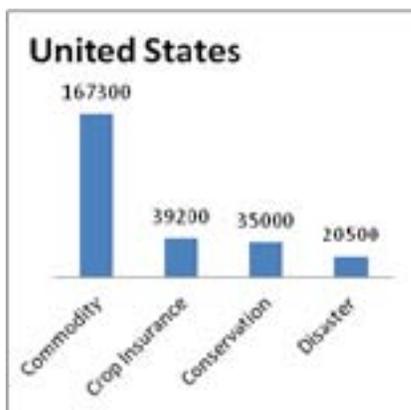
I was hired as a Step-Student at NRCS through a University job posting in July 2009. As a business major, my only exposure to agriculture was the Farm Bill [[Farm Bill 2008](#)] and its' commodity spending. I have been working with SCA (Student Conservation Association) as a Conservation Intern since July 2010. I assist with EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentives Program) payments, draft and monitor numerous grants and agreements, including for example CIG (Conservation Innovation Grants), and complete any and every task necessary to fulfill our mission.

In order to understand the NRCS Pacific Islands Area Mission, "Our People...Our Islands... In Harmony," I extensively researched NRCS PIA's involvement in Hawaii agriculture. I learned that Hawaii's agricultural spending, unlike that of most of the U.S., focuses on conservation and disaster. Areas that deal directly with natural resources are on the forefront of Hawaii's Federal agricultural spending.

Throughout my SCA internship, I learned a lot about conservation practices, grants and agreements, and Federal Regulations. I would highly recommend the SCA Internships to Agricultural Majors looking to continue on their path to future conservation.

Data Acquired from Environmental Working Group ([EWG Farm Subsidy Database](#))

*Charts: Federal Agricultural Spending 1995-2010 in *millions*



Works Cited

EWG Farm Subsidy Database. Web. 14 Nov. 2011. <<http://farm.ewg.org/>>.

"Farm Bill 2008 | USDA." *U.S. Department of Agriculture*. Web. 14 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/farmbill2008?navid=FARMBILL2008>>.

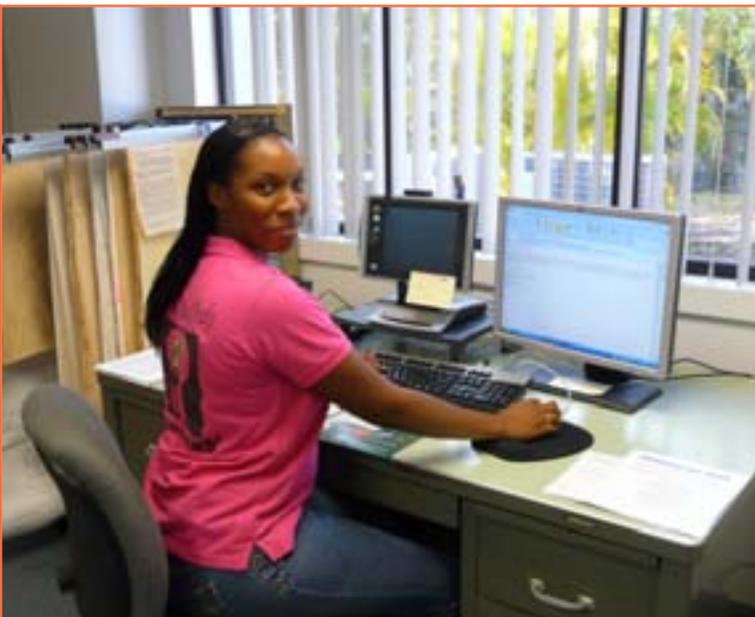
Summer Highlights

I am a graduate student working on master's degree in urban forestry from Southern University in Baton Rouge, LA. I am currently working under the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP) with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), an agency of the USDA, in the Kealahou Service Center on the "Big Island" of Hawaii. This summer has been a great opportunity for me as I have learned more things in these couple of weeks than I would have in one semester of classes.

Through the use of field visits to a variety of coffee and fruit orchards, ranches, and site visits to flood control structures, my supervisor has increased my level of knowledge on working with producers and how to begin the conservation planning process. Learning the technical aspects such as how to use Toolkit, Protracts, GPS and ArcMap, softwares used to develop and track conservation plans, has been an important part of this training.

This experience has been enjoyable because the entire office staff is very helpful and eager to share their knowledge with me, someone they see as a member of the next generation of conservationists. I have learned that this sharing of knowledge is a large part of what being a professional is.

The most enjoyable part of the entire experience has been in being able to help producers by recommending conservation practices that will improve their land and help them prosper.



Amy Gilliam in Kealahou



Matt Chong in Aiea

My Summer Internship Experience

Working for NRCS has taught me a great deal about conservation planning and what it entails. As a student trainee soil conservationist, I have become familiar with the computer program Toolkit/ArcMap. I also had the experience of using Total Station, GPS systems, and other field equipment, which helped me to collect preliminary data to carry out my conservation planning. I am competent in survey work, inventorying resources and am knowledgeable about some of the practices that are commonly used. I am aware of the programs that are offered to private landowners, ranchers and farmers to support them in improving water quality and quantity, reducing soil erosion, increasing wildlife habitat, and enhancing natural resources to better the environment.

My first hands-on surveying experience was by far the most enjoyable! I happened to have a chance in working with the State Soil Scientist and Biologist in delineating property in He'ia Mahuahua Ai o Hoi. Our goal was to distinguish and determine boundaries to implement the practice of restoring native wetlands.

I worked with Michael Bajinting, Oahu County Resource Conservationist at Kunia Ag Park, lending him a hand in surveying a client's property. Our goal was to determine what portion of the property was highly erodible land (HEL).

Towards the end of my internship, I got a chance to work one-on-one with a client on the windward side of Oahu. The goal of this project was to divert water and realign irrigation pipeline systems along the property to help conserve and capture more water for his crops.

In summary, my internship experience was momentous and enjoyable! I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to work for NRCS in partnership with other federal, state and non-profit groups.

Summer Highlights Continued



Jan Reyes in Guam

My summer STEP experience at the Guam Field Office was great. During my internship, I was able to enhance my knowledge of Tool-Kit and RUSLE, the importance of proper communication with the cooperators, understand the dire need of a positive morale, how much of an influence an available labor force could impact a farm's productivity, as well as the skeleton and the importance of a successful EWP design. In addition, I also had the opportunity to learn and share a passion of mine with Joe Tuquero; who showed me the ropes of the native vegetation, trees, and shrubs found only in the island of Guam as well as some that were found in the CNMI and the Pacific Islands. Much of the activities that I really enjoyed were assisting the farmers and ranchers, accomplishing a variety of field assessments, and learning about Guam's cultural history. Although my 2011 STEP location was only several hundreds of miles away from my 'home' island, what I took from this was an even more different perspective as to how we must approach conservation movement as a whole, the importance of sustaining cultural identity, and a greater drive to learn more in order to become an effective and proficient individual from this agency.



Makalani Pina in Hilo

First of all I would like to say thank you for this great experience. This summer I worked with the Hilo NRCS and began my experience in conservation planning. The first steps were learning about the process it takes to create a plan and even the steps before a plan is put together. I was blessed to go to ranches, farms, seminars, and for the first time a real dairy. That experience alone was amazing. Also I learned skills that an intern should have, like being able to file, follow instructions, and multi task. I help coordinate the move from our recent location, by packing away important folders, taking down inventory of things that need to keep and excise, helping my fellow employers in anyway, even if it was only getting boxes. In the short time that I have been here I gain an understanding of the importance of conservation and with this experience and exposure it made me realize that agriculture is my passion. This experience has been better than I could imagine, I hope to have the opportunity again. Thank you.

48 Species Listed and 47 Critical Habitat Designations on Kauai

by Gregory A. Koob, State Biologist

Last year, the US Fish and Wildlife Service announced adding 48 species unique to the island of Kauai to the federal list of threatened and endangered species and designating critical habitat on the island for 47 of these species.

Hawaii has more threatened and endangered species than any other state in the country. All of the Kauai species included in this decision are threatened by ongoing habitat destruction or modification due to nonnative plants and to feral ungulates such as pigs and sheep. Several Kauai species are threatened by destruction or modification of habitat due to fire, landslides, and flooding. In addition to the threats to their habitat, one or more of the 48 species are threatened by limited numbers, predation, competition from nonnative plants, lack of reproduction, diseases, vandalism and overcollection.

The 45 plant species newly listed as endangered include a variety of ferns, vines, shrubs, and trees found nowhere else in the world. Twenty-three of the plant species have fewer than 50 individuals remaining in the wild, and some have not been seen for several years, though they are believed to still exist in remote areas. One fern, *Diellia manii*, was thought to be extinct since the early 1900s, but a single individual was rediscovered in 2002 at Kokee State Park. The addition of these plant species to the endangered species list brings the total number of endangered Hawaiian plants to 309. Another 10 are considered threatened.

The two bird species added to the endangered species list are both Hawaiian honeycreepers in the finch family: the akeke, or Kauai akepa, and the akikiki, or Kauai creeper. Both species were considered common in the late 1800s and into the early 1960s. The akeke population appeared to be relatively stable at that time, even while other endemic Kauai birds were sharply declining, and its population was estimated to be nearly 8,000 birds in 2000. However, the population had dropped to approximately 3,500 birds by 2007. The akikiki population has declined even further, by about 80 percent in the last 40 years, to approximately 1,300 birds in 2007. These two species join 33 other bird species listed as endangered and another listed as threatened in Hawaii.

Drosophila sharpi is a large species of Hawaiian picture-wing fly found in Kauai's wet forests. The rule proposing to list this species named the species as *Drosophila attigua*, but that species was found to be identical to *Drosophila sharpi*. The final rule reflects this recent taxonomic revision. The species joins 12 other Hawaiian picture-wing flies on the endangered species list.

A total of 26,582 acres in six different ecosystem types are being designated as critical habitat for 47 of the species. Of the total acreage, 98 percent (26,050 acres) overlaps existing critical habitat for other species. The majority of the designated critical habitat, 21,666 acres, is located on state-owned lands, while 4,918 acres are located on privately owned lands. An additional 1,052 acres proposed as critical habitat were excluded from the final designation because the designation would have had a negative effect on the private landowner's voluntary ongoing and future conservation activities. The land is owned by Alexander & Baldwin, Inc., and is located in the Upper Wainiha Valley. The area is managed by The Nature Conservancy for the long-term protection of this upper watershed.

Over the next several years, the USFWS plans to use the ecosystem approach to propose listing and designating critical habitat for all of the endemic candidate species from the other Hawaiian Islands: one rule each for Oahu, Hawaii, and Maui Nui (Maui, Kahoolawe, Molokai, and Lanai). The USFWS will also propose a single rule for Hawaiian species found on multiple islands. Each action will propose endangered or threatened status for each species and will also propose critical habitat for species when considered prudent.

Win Win at the Live Animal Auction

by Jolene Lau, State Public Affairs Specialist, Honolulu



Tatjana Calimpong-Burke

Holy smokes I won a pig! Never in my wildest imagination did I think I'd get involved in a live animal auction as a bidder.

When I signed up to work at our outreach booth during the State Fair (put on by 4H) I never anticipated that I'd make THAT much of a difference in my community. After talking with a few friends about 4H and learning about the students that work so hard, something in me just wanted to help and contribute towards the fundraiser. After all, these kids are doing way more in their community!

Allow me to introduce you to the brightest, happiest, and most admirable 13-year olds out there... Meet Tatjana Calimpong-Burke. A hard working 8th grader at Iolani School, who is active with volleyball, towering over me at five feet, nine inches tall.

Tatjana is in her third year with the Oahu County 4H and she was one of 12 students who raised hogs for this year's live auction at the State Fair. She bred and watched the mother deliver "Musubi" at her family farm, "T's 4H Farm" so Tatjana was the breeder and the exhibitor in her hog project. In the last four months, a typical routine included feeding "musubi" twice a day, taking her for a walk, and keeping her clean as needed.

Knowing that the end result would be purchase and consumption, Tatjana fattened up "musubi" to 200 pounds. When asked what she learned the most out of this 4H Livestock experience, she said, "patience, responsibility, humility, and encouraging others." She added, "There are kids out there who have never seen a live cow before. People must know where their source of food is coming from and what it is being fed."

To help raise awareness, Tatjana offered field trip opportunities to her classmates so that they could learn more about farming, livestock, and being sustainable at her family farm, "T's 4H Farm." She also raises cows, goats, lambs, and chickens at the Kunia Ridge Farmlands.

So what 13 year old do you know that is interested in livestock basics such as feeding, cleaning, and keeping an animal healthy? Not only is she interested in the veterinarian side of things, but she also has experience with the business and financial side of things too! Yup, she received a Youth Farm Loan last year to help her purchase a variety of feed types to test which ones work best for certain kinds of animal development. Impressive right!

So the auction bid wasn't just a win for me as a bidder or Tatjana as the breeder and exhibitor, but 4H benefits from the fundraiser too. President of the State 4H Livestock Council, Mike Tulang (retired from the Natural Resources Conservation Service) says that the money goes towards youth education and a synergy of programs that foster comprehensive personal development, working with family members, and giving the students an opportunity to make new friends with other 4Hers from around the state.

My time at this year's fair at Kualoa Ranch was definitely different from my previous outreach events. Might have been similar faces but there sure was an opportunity to make new friends too. James Nakatani, Deputy to the Chairperson of the Hawaii State Department of Agriculture says, "We were glad to continue the partnership and help 4H in coordinating this year's fair."

In closing, the students in 4H are the heartbeat to keeping local agriculture alive. The teachers and parents are instrumental in fostering their education but it really is the kids doing a fantastic job. The "win" for me was more of an educational

Ugum-Atate Forestry Team



In partnership with Guam Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Forestry, NRCS is providing training on how to prep, dig and describe a simple soil investigation pit. As part of site investigations, the team will dig small pits and collect soil samples, note observation of horizons, effective rooting depth to establish the baseline site assessment.

In addition, the forest on the ridge crest they hiked in Guam has a limestone outcrop with a dark black rich organic soil. The team planted vetiver slips, sowed some acacia seeds in the soil pit they dug up, and collected some basic site data.

Go Team Ugum-Atate!

Happy Holidays,
Wishing you all the
best for 2012!

NRCS and Safety



Drew Stout, Civil Engineer in Waimea

*By Laila Jarryousi, Soil Conservationist,
Waimea Field Office*

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration was established in 1971 by Congress to protect the health and safety of employees on the job. Employee safety is essential for the mission of the NRCS. NRCS employees have been injured and even killed during the course of doing their job. Therefore, improving employee safety is the responsibility of the NRCS and each individual employee.

The Waimea Field Office began conducting “Monthly Safety Briefs” during our Staff Meetings in July 2011. The intention of the safety briefs are to bring up safety concerns that we have during the course of accomplishing our mission. Examples of the safety briefs conducted so far include Heat Stroke Safety, Proper Lifting, Distracted/Defensive Driving and Sun Exposure.

The Waimea Field Office Staff use ATV’s which make us more efficient at doing our job. The Waimea staff that use ATV’s have all had ATV safety training by the ATV Safety Institute.

Safety is everyone’s job and responsibility. We are all responsible for maintaining a healthy and save work place. Drive defensively, avoid situations that put yourself and others at risk, report on the job accidents, injuries, illness or property damage, report unsafe or unhealthy working conditions, and maintain a drug free work place. Improving NRCS safety is paramount! Just remember SAFETY FIRST!



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U.S. EMBASSY HARVESTS GARDEN WITH CCA STUDENTS

On October 28, nearly 50 7th and 8th grade students and staff from the Calvary Christian Academy visited the U.S. Embassy to see the fruits of their earlier labor. They harvested Chinese cabbage from the Embassy vegetable garden that they planted back on October 3. In preparation for the visits to the Embassy, Soil Conservation Technician Gibson Santos of the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service spoke with students at their school about home gardening and soil health.

The vegetables, including the Chinese cabbage, head cabbage, tomato, eggplant, and okra, were planted in a variety of raised beds to help students think creatively and understand that gardens can be created at home from local materials. The beds were made from coconut husk, coconut tree logs, bamboo, stones, wire fencing, and planting pots. The soil used to fill the beds was amended with compost to increase fertility.

Mr. Santos discussed pest control with the students as worms had been attacking the cabbage leaves prior to harvest. He emphasized keeping the garden clean and manually removing the worms to minimize damage to the plants.

When Santos asked the students if anyone knew how to weave a kiam, a small basket woven from palm fronds, student Caleb Abraham was eager to show his skills. In a few moments time, the kiam was ready for the first cabbage harvested by 7th and 8th grade class presidents Bomin Kwon and Jericho Akinaga, respectively. With their classmates watching closely, Kwon and Akinaga then presented the first cabbage to Charge Lori Dando, a custom locally bestowed upon Kings and Chiefs on Pohnpei. Ms. Dando welcomed the students and thanked them for the gift. When she asked the students what they had learned from their experience, one student exclaimed, "Organic gardening is good!"



Cabbage grown in a raised vegetable bed made from local stones.



USDA NRCS Soil Conservation Technician Gibson Santos discussing garden management and pest control with CCA students.