

Hamakua-Kau Watershed



Description

The Island of Hawaii (also known as “The Big Island”), is the largest and southernmost island of the Hawaiian Islands (Figure 1). The four 10-digit Hydrologic Unit Code (HUC) watersheds Hamakua, Hilo, Puna, and Kau total approximately 1,494,777 acres on the Northeast side of the Big Island of Hawaii. Conservation assistance is provided by the NRCS Hilo and Waimea Field offices and the Big Island RC&D.

With estimated overall farm and processed value of island-grown commodities at approximately \$500 million, agriculture is a major force in Hawaii’s economy. The bulk of Hawaii’s agricultural products are grown and processed in Hawaii County.

Hawaii’s mild, tropical climate allows for year-round agricultural production with minimal seasonal influences. In 1994, around 68,000 acres of former sugarcane lands came available on the Big Island (34,560 acres – Hamakua Sugar Co., 17,860 acres – Hilo Coast, and 16,000 acres – Kau Agribusiness). In spite of the increased availability of land and the fluctuation of agriculture commodities trends towards the diversification of agriculture is on the rise.

According to the Hawaii Agriculture Statistic Report (HAS 2003), diversified agriculture can be defined as all commodities other than sugar and pineapple. The diversification of Hawaii’s agriculture industry is becoming an economic power for the County of Hawaii. Hawaii County is the state’s agriculture leader accounting for 1 million of the state’s 1.8 million acres in diversified agriculture production. Hawaii County’s diversified agriculture industry directly employs over 2,550 people, produces \$300 million annual revenue, and supplies at least 50% of the Big Island’s fresh fruits and vegetable consumption.

Although Hawaii County is seeing a growing trend toward the expansion of diversified agriculture, farmers are faced with many constraints such as pest infestation, private land development, the availability of water, and the lack of available and reliable transportation for all agriculture products. Hawaii, like many other tropical places, has agriculture pests such as fruit flies that destroy crops. The U.S. mainland and foreign markets prohibit the entry of Hawaii’s fresh produce into their markets due to these pests. In coordination with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Hawaii County is in the process of developing various quarantine treatment programs that will allow for the export of various agriculture commodities.

As the demand for locally grown produce increases, many farms are striving to meet the demands of local consumers. Farmer markets and campaigns are being developed to promote and educate consumers about local produce that is seasonally available. The Buy Fresh, Buy Local campaign is a collaborative effort between the Hawaii State Departments of Agriculture, Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation and the University of Hawaii College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resource (CTHAR). The goal of the campaign is to encourage consumers to purchase fresh locally grown produce that in turn keeps money circulating within the community.