



Director Announced for the NRCS Pacific Islands Area

By: Jolene Lau, State Public Affairs Specialist



Bruce Petersen, NRCS Director of the Pacific Islands Area

Chief Jason Weller of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced his selection of the Director for the Pacific Islands Area. Bruce Petersen, currently the Nevada State Conservationist, will serve as the NRCS Director in the islands effective March 9, 2015.

Bruce Petersen worked for the Soil Conservation Service, now called the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for 28 years, working in Minnesota, Wyoming, and Nevada. He earned a degree in Agriculture Business Management from the University of Minnesota and served in several field and state office positions, most recently as the State Conservationist for Nevada.

Bruce brings a history of success and experience to his new position as the director for the Pacific Islands Area.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the NRCS staff, and excited to help advance agriculture profitability, protect resources, and improve the quality of life for producers and partners in the Pacific Islands Area," said Petersen.

Bruce Petersen served as the Nevada state conservationist since January 2009. He started his career as a soil conservation technician in Minnesota, working his way up to soil conservationist then district conservationist. He also worked for several years as a technician for conservation districts in Minnesota and Wisconsin. He worked for the NRCS in Wyoming for 11 years, serving as assistant state conservationist for operations, programs, and partnership liaison, before coming to Nevada.

As we welcome Bruce and his wife to the islands in March, we would also like to thank Craig Derickson for his hard work and dedication in the Pacific Islands Area while serving as Acting Director. Craig returned to Nebraska at the end of February as their state conservationist. Previous acting directors also included Carlos Suarez of California, Christine Clarke of Massachusetts, and Bill Puckett of Alabama.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to work with the NRCS staff, and excited to help advance agriculture profitability, protect resources, and improve the quality of life for producers and partners in the Pacific Islands Area."

- Bruce Petersen, NRCS Director of PIA

Happy 80th Anniversary NRCS!



Craig Derickson, Acting Director

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

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Message from the Acting Director

This is my last week as the Acting NRCS Director for the Pacific Islands Area, and I will be returning to my home and family in Nebraska this Friday. As you know, Mr. Bruce Petersen will report as the new permanent Director on Monday March 9th. I know all of you are excited to have Bruce coming onboard as the new NRCS Director and you are glad to have the certainty of a new permanent NRCS Director. Bruce is an experienced NRCS State Conservationist and he has very good teamwork and collaboration skills to bring to the NRCS family in PIA and the conservation partnership.

I am honored to have had the opportunity to serve as your Acting Director in PIA, and I very much appreciate the support, kindness and hospitality I have received. I have been genuinely impressed with the knowledge and professionalism of the Leadership Team and I value the contribution that each of them make to the PIA management team. I have had the pleasure of visiting many field offices in PIA to see firsthand the terrific work being done by NRCS employees and our partners. I am proud of the quality and capability of the NRCS employees in the PIA, and the cooperative and dedicated spirit of the District employees. There is a lot of terrific conservation activity underway here in the PIA, and there is potential for much more to come through cooperation and fresh perspectives at NRCS, the Districts and our partners. Thank you all for the friendship and hospitality during my detail as the Acting Director in NRCS Pacific Islands Area.

Best wishes,
Craig Derickson

Message from the NRCS PIA State Director

Thank you for the warm welcome to this wonderful area. I have been here a month and have found a place to live and am once again reunited with my household goods and vehicles. It is good to feel settled again.

I have a fair amount of experience in a variety of places, but I have never worked in a place that has presented me with this steep of a learning curve. I was told this week to forget everything I ever knew about farming and ranching because it is all different here. I think that is good advice. I have had the chance to visit several offices and meet a few of the field staff and district partners. I plan to visit every office in the near future and look forward to meeting you. In the month that I have been here, I have learned enough of PIA history to recognize that there have been many changes and that the last several years have not been easy for you. I hope that I can bring some long-term stability to our operation. You will probably find that I have a little different philosophy and management style than some of my predecessors. You may see changes in the way we do business in some staffing, financial, and programmatic areas. I will not make decisions in a vacuum and I look forward to recommendations from the leadership team and the "Future Directions Committee" to help focus our operation on the Chief's priorities.

I received our fiscal year 2015 budget allocation. We will have to absorb some budget cuts, so I will be watchful and strategic with regards to filling vacancies, travel, and support costs. I am grateful for the field efforts to obligate Farm Bill program funding. I was informed this week that we have passed the \$3 million dollars obligated mark, hopefully on our way to utilizing all the Farm Bill funding available to PIA. We've been selected as one of five pilot states to introduce practice code 297 – Feral Swine Management Interim Conservation Activity. This opportunity has generated a great deal of interest from partners, producers, and staff. You will be receiving more information and training shortly and it is my expectation that we can engage partners and producers and make this a successful pilot. In this climate of reduced program funding it is important that we make Farm Bill program outreach a priority and utilize all the Farm Bill programs available to the PIA.

In closing, I am sharing a few quotes from our Chief. I would like us to remember these and incorporate them into the way we do business in the PIA:

- Assume positive intent when you receive direction or hear guidance.
- Break the cycle of being a victim, put a positive spin on new opportunities, and
- There is no down side from doing the job of getting conservation on the ground.

I am glad to be here and look forward to working with you.

Bruce Petersen
PIA Director

National Association of Conservation Districts Held Annual Gathering

Excerpts from NACDnet.org



NRCS Chief Jason Weller

February 3, 2015 - Tuesday morning's General Session featured presentations about the past, present and future of conservation. Former NRCS Chief Dave White spoke on the history of conservation districts and the impetus the Dust Bowl had in bringing people together in locally-led land and soil conservation efforts.

Following Chief White's address there was a panel discussion focusing on conservation today. Panelists included Karl Dalla Rosa, Forest Stewardship Program Manager, U.S. Forest Service; Ellen Gilinsky, Ph.D., Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Water, U.S. EPA; Kristin Thomasgard,

Program Director, Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program, Department of Defense; and Cynthia Moses-Nedd, Liason to State and Local Government, Bureau of Land Management.

Rounding out the program was current NRCS Chief Jason Weller who spoke about the vision for the future of conservation.



Bill McDonald (L), Guam SWCD and Wes Nohara (R), West Maui SWCD, confer as the business meeting begins at the NACD conference in New Orleans.



Wes Nohara (right), West Maui SWCD with a conference vendor.



Acting Director Craig Derickson and incoming permanent Director Bruce Petersen meet District members from the Pacific Islands Area at the NACD conference in New Orleans.



FBI's Victim Assistance Program

By: Jolene Lau, State Public Affairs Specialist

Do you know how to identify a victim of human trafficking? Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Krysta Harden communicated with the entire Department regarding USDA's role in combating human trafficking in agriculture. In her Departmental Memo dated February 4, 2015, Krysta stated, "Human trafficking is a hidden crime that affects our domestic agricultural and food industries when traffickers exploit people for commercial gain. Traffickers use force, fraud or coercion to force victims to work in fields and factories here at home."

In response to the President's call to action, USDA's AgLearn recently launched a new training program, "USDA Combating Human Trafficking" to provide information regarding this international problem and to increase awareness of victim indicators. This training is available to all USDA personnel via AgLearn. We are all encouraged to take the online course and learn more about this to help combat the problem.

On February 10th, Monica Rowsey, the Victim Specialist for the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Honolulu Office came to the state office and shared her message over lunch time at the Federal Building. Her presentation also helped participants to understand terms, case studies, the legal system, and the terrible impact of human trafficking. This was an eye-opening session that taught us that gross trafficking, whether labor or sex related, happens in our islands-not just the mainland.

Most of us would never know that exploiters were recruiting in our schools, malls, or even through the internet. Monica also educated us about how victims are easily coerced into illegal activities, even at the tender age of 12. With most of us having children or being around children, it's heartbreaking to hear of the actual crimes.

Awareness is a step closer to combating human trafficking. Please take the time to educate yourself and use the training available from AgLearn. Let's do our part to combat human trafficking and support USDA's efforts to identify victim indicators.



Jolene Lau with guest speaker, Monica Rowsey from FBI.

NRCS Model Farms Produce a Healthy Harvest

By Arlene Rosenkrans, Resource Conservationist, Pohnpei



A farmer of Pohsoain village in Kitti.

USDA NRCS staff has been working with ten farmers in Pohsoain village in Kitti on a weekly basis since August 2014 to implement a UN Telefood project under the direction of Village Chief Herman Semes.

NRCS helped the farmers with planting and crop rotation plans to maintain soil health and plant productivity. The 75' x 75' plots are progressing, with some seed supply and pest issues. Some have acquired poultry and are doing small scale "chicken tractors." Over 2,000 lbs. of crops have been sold and an equal amount provided for household meals and ceremonies.

AWAK River Clean Up and Piggery Project

By Arlene Rosenkrans, Resource Conservationist, Pohnpei

The first completed dry litter piggery in the Awak River Clean-up and Piggery Project was recently visited by USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service staff and partner organizations. The funding from the UN Global Environmental Fund Small Grants Program is being administered by the Micronesia Conservation Trust.

The Pohnpei Soil and Water Conservation District Chairman, Mark Kostka was instrumental in assisting the landowner with piggery designs and advice. NRCS has offered additional assistance for compost management and future design considerations. Up to 26 piggeries along the Awak River have been identified for refurbishment or rebuilding to lower dangerous levels of contamination found in the river by the Pohnpei Environmental Protection Agency and the University of Hawaii in 2013. The farmers are working through a revolving no-interest small loan as a model for future projects throughout the islands.



BJ Obispo from the Awak Youth Organization with landowner Lotis Seneres at his new piggery in Awak.

Seasonal High Tunnel Success Story

By Carl Hashimoto, Soil Conservation Technician, Kahului

In honor of Women's month, I would like to share a success story about one of Maui's woman cooperators. Suzie Pisano and her husband (Randy) resides and farms on the east side of Maui (Hana). They grow various vegetable crops, but the high rainfall and insect pests affect the crops growing conditions. Suzie applied and was approved for an Environmental Quality Incentive Program contract which included the Conservation Practice Seasonal High Tunnel (798). The 798 practice was certified last summer (2014), so I contacted Suzie to follow-up on her progress of farming in the Seasonal High Tunnel and would like to share her story and photos.

Suzie writes:

"The Seasonal High Tunnel (hoop house) is amazing. I have about 1/2 of the area inside of the hoop house planted in tomatoes, string beans, and lettuce and can say it is 100% helping. I planted the same crops at the same time outside of the hoop house, and those crops all failed. The ones outside were eaten by grasshoppers and the ones that survived grew very slow. While I was harvesting the inside crops, the ones outside were still only 2 inches tall.

A month ago was our first harvest which was a huge success at our roadside stand. The second crop is in but they are still small. I want to get another one; it's working so well. I have been telling everyone interested in growing food to get one. Every time it rains, I just remember how protected my little Keiki's are. Plus, no grasshoppers are getting to them. I did have some aphids on my bok choy but sprayed them with soap and tomato leaf tea. That took care of them. Also, a white cabbage moth got in and laid eggs on my collards, but I easily killed the baby worms manually. No new moths have gotten in."



Suzie Pisano's Seasonal High Tunnel and vegetables!

The Seasonal High Tunnel success story it is!

Earth Team Volunteers Help at Bishop Museum

By: Susan Kubo, Civil Engineer, Aiea Service Center

On March 15, our dedicated volunteers participated in "Science Alive" at the Bishop Museum. Huge mahalo to Michael Bajtinting, Mandy Chen, Susan Kubo, Bernadette Luncsford, and Sharon Sawdey! We were also joined by partner Jayme Barton of HARC. These outstanding individuals gave up a Sunday to talk to the community about soil health. Participants got to see soils demonstrations and play Aiea field office's new soils game!

In addition to the game, we ran our cover crop cocktail calculator and designed mixed species cover crop cocktails for over 20 home gardens. Seed for 11 varieties of cover crop was donated by Koolau Seed Company.

Prizes for kids were a Sammy Soil Activity Book or a Soil Health Cootie Catcher (see below).



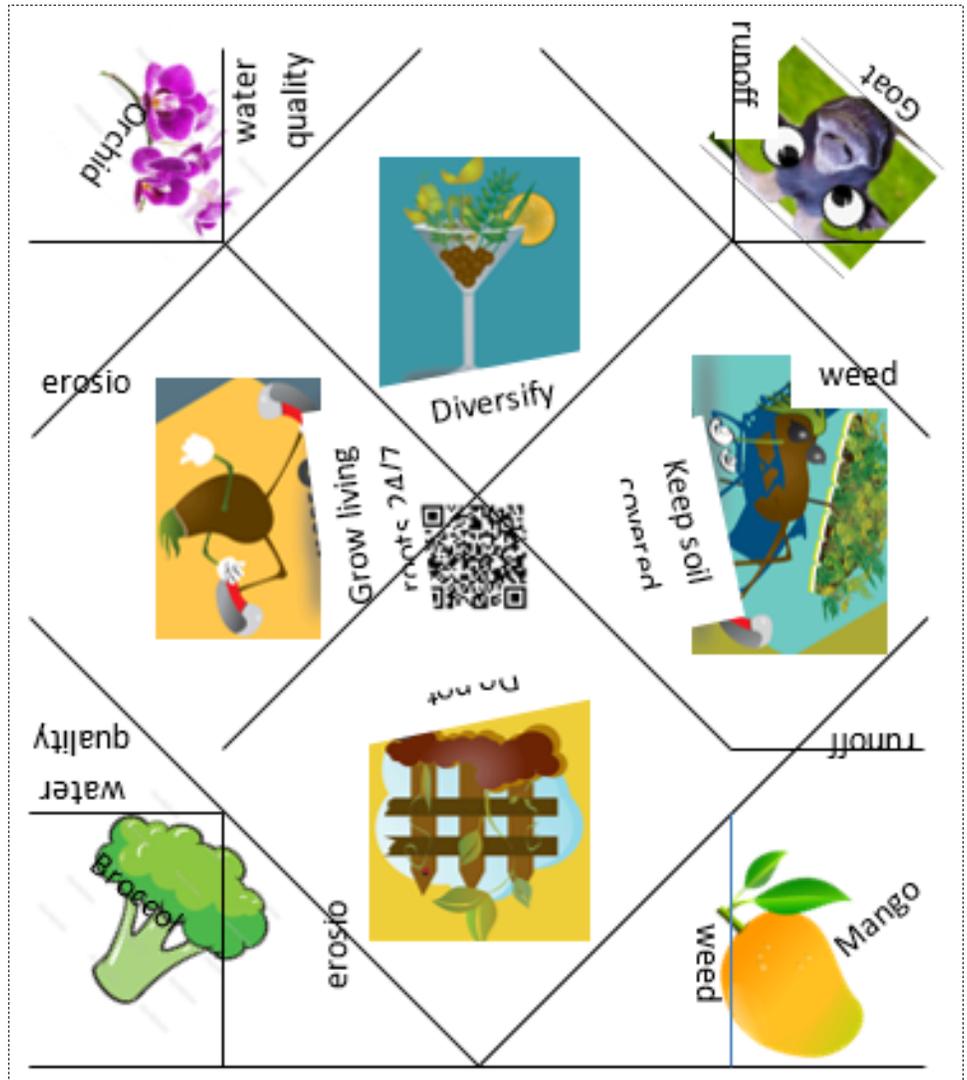
Susan explaining the cover crop cocktail calculator with a home gardener.



Michael sharing soil health secrets.



Sharon and Bernadette using the soil health game to teach kids soil health principles and benefits.



Happy Volunteer Week April 12-18th!

Digging Deeper: Soil scientist Amy Koch and Waimea Middle School students explore soil in the school garden

By Amy Koch, GIS Specialist/Resource Soil Scientist

For the third year in a row, I had the pleasure of spending a day at Waimea Middle School and Mala`ai Garden teaching 7th graders about basic soil concepts. The students are such fun to work with because they aren't afraid to get dirty. I taught six classes with 20-25 students each, including students with special needs and many socially disadvantaged and minority students.

We started in the classroom with a presentation on soil, soil survey, Hawaii soil forming factors, and career opportunities in natural resources. Students asked me questions and also answered questions I asked them to test their knowledge and listening skills. The classroom talk was followed by a hands-on activity in the school garden. This activity aligned with their science curriculum on understanding biotic (living) and abiotic (non-living) factors in an ecosystem. It also provided them the opportunity to explore the process of scientific inquiry by describing soil properties and recording their observations on a data sheet. The students dug soil pits and described soil horizons, texture, and color. They also observed soil organisms (worms and insects), roots, organic matter (mulch and compost), soil temperature and moisture, and rocks.

This year I also highlighted the International Year of Soils (IYS) and talked about why soil and soil health are important. I commended their soil health efforts in the garden – including soil cover, live roots, composting and mulching, and even vermicomposting! I even made IYS stickers to give out to the students that were a big hit.

More on the Mala`ai school garden program: <http://malaai.org/>



Top left: Amy Koch discusses biotic and abiotic factors with the students, incorporating their observations in the soil pit. Biotic factors are the living parts of an ecosystem. Examples include roots or earthworms. Abiotic factors are the non-living components such as rocks.

Top middle: A student shows off her soil sample used for determining texture.

Top right: Amy Koch digs into the soil pit to collect a sample for determining soil texture and color.

Bottom: Two students determine the soil color using a Munsell soil chart.

Employee Spotlight

By Kurencio Ngowaki, Management Assistant - West Area Office



As the Pacific Islands Area Management Program Assistant, I perform essential work and work that I enjoy. Throughout my career with NRCS there has been a diversity of interesting projects and tasks I have worked on to support the Pacific Islands Area conservation mission... "Helping people, Help the Land".

Over the years I have helped in relocation of the NRCS Guam and Area offices, been a PIA Web-Author, and even back in the day, sweated it out in the field working on a number of watershed conservation demonstration projects in direct support of the NRCS core mission – Soil and Water Conservation.

More typical work is the support I provide to PIA District Conservationists and state leadership in assisting with NRCS fleet operations, purchasing and a host of other State, Area and Field office support tasks. One such task is being the Registrar for the Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12). I enroll, inventory and issue NRCS and other federal employee's, contractors and affiliates their (PIV) or LincPass Smartcards. A second task, is my service in a second term as the National Asian American/Pacific Islander (AA/PI) Emphasis Program Manager with the NRCS Talent Management Division. I enjoy the responsibility of this collateral duty assignment as an employee representative to channel important information to agency leadership. The AA/PI Emphasis Program helps to address issues of employment, retention, promotion, training, career development, and advancement, anything that affects AA/PI applicants and NRCS employees.

Most recently, I was honored to be appointed to represent our Pacific Islands Area team to review a new National (NEDCS) course entitled 'Working Effectively with Asian American Pacific Islander (AA/PI) Producers'. The NEDCS team will work collaboratively to develop this new course. We hope it will meet the needs of NRCS staff and affiliates to increase our opportunities to address the needs of Pacific Islanders and Asian cooperators as they work with NRCS to access USDA Farm Bill programs and Conservation Technical Assistance services.

Where are they now?

Leo Smock Randall, Conservation Planner, Riverhead, NY.

Leo Smock Randall (former soil conservationist in Kahului) will be returning to the NRCS as a Conservation Planner for the field office in Riverhead, NY starting in April. During the last couple years Leo has been living in his home state of New Hampshire showing his Maui-adopted dog Lani what New England winters are all about.

During his time in NH, he has been working as a Farmers' Market Manager for Sea-coast Eat Local, a non profit focused on food access for all socioeconomic levels. He has also been working as a Research Tech for the University of New Hampshire researching carbon and nitrogen cycles in forest systems, focusing on the unknown contributions of fungal networks. He has greatly enjoyed his time working with farms on food access and marketing and is excited to get back into the land management and planning side of farming.

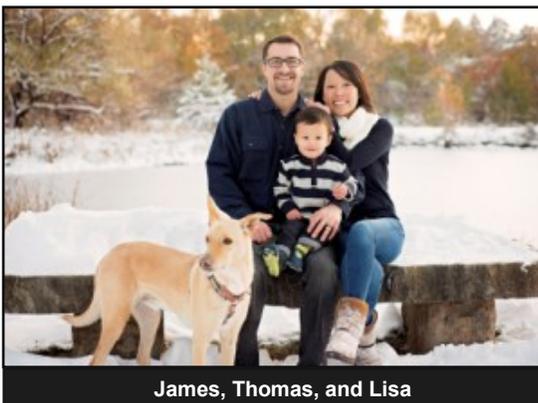


Leo donating food.

James Eller, District Conservationist, Caldwell Field Office.

Greeting Pacific Islands Area,

Lisa and I have finally settled down after 12 years of regular travel. We live in Boise, Idaho. I am the District Conservationist for the Caldwell Field Office and Lisa works for The Nature Conservancy as the Director of Marketing and Communications. We are appreciative for the opportunity to live and work in such wonderful places. I have



James, Thomas, and Lisa

learned a great deal as an NRCS Conservationist and have used those skills to get a lot of great conservation projects on the ground. It is very gratifying to look back and remember how it all started as a SCEP student while finishing up my degree at the University of Hawaii. Many of you have helped shape my career and for that I am grateful.

It has been several years but we haven't forgotten about all of our friends and colleagues in the islands. Don't worry, I've made it a point to represent the islands by wearing aloha shirts and eating Poke for lunch. I've also been known to watch surf contests on my iPhone during breaks and obsess about epic surf in far off locations. Because we don't have any surf or places to go spearfishing, I have taken up mountain biking, snowboarding, and running.

We recently added a new member to the family. Thomas is now 2 years old. As you can imagine, he keeps us very busy. We recently took Thomas on his first trip to Hawaii to visit family. He now asks if he can go to Hawaii on a daily basis. I guess it's in his DNA.

Aloha, James

Wishing You All the Best in 2015!

Personnel Update

Incoming:

- ◆ Cadby, Jeana, Conservation Specialist (South Oahu SWCD). EOD: 03/16/2015
- ◆ Chaffee, Mark, Conservation Specialist (East Kauai SWCD). EOD: 01/05/2015
- ◆ Dunn, Jennifer, District Conservationist (Lihue, HI). EOD: 04/05/2015
- ◆ Hew, Jason, Conservation Specialist (Central Maui SWCD). EOD: 12/01/2014
- ◆ Gavenda, Robert, Affiliate Soil Scientist (Guam SWCD). EOD: 02/13/2015
- ◆ Gerken, Alex, CREP Planner (Hilo SWCD). EOD: 01/05/2015
- ◆ Kinvig, Kevin, Financial Resources Specialist (State Office). EOD: 01/25/2015
- ◆ Petersen, Bruce, Director (State Office). EOD: 03/08/2015
- ◆ Ventura, Leonard-John, Conservation Planner (Northern Guam SWCD). EOD: 02/11/2015
- ◆ Vidinha, Harrison, Conservation Specialist (Kau SWCD). EOD: 03/16/2015



Bruce & Cindy Petersen

Outgoing:

- ◆ Robert Gavenda, retirement. 01/10/2015

Awards:

- ◆ Length of Service—25 years: Cynthia Shishido
- ◆ Length of Service—35 years: Nicola Giardina



(L-R): Adam Reed, (Water Quality Specialist), Donna Hopwood (ADFO - East), Bruce Petersen (PIA Director), and his wife, Cindy Petersen.



(L-R) PIA Director, Bruce Petersen, his wife, Cindy Petersen, Pamela Aguon, Samantha Peel, Cheryl Morton, Darlene Cho, Sherman White, Donna Hopwood, and Jason Peel.