

Local Work Group Meeting Report

The Kona Soil and Water Conservation District (KSWCD) held its annual Local Work Group meeting on 4/30/15. It was attended by 20 people from our local agricultural community.

1. Soil Health
2. Soil Erosion
3. Water quantity
4. Water quality
5. Animals, invasive species, particularly the pig. The invasive semi-slug and its relationship with the invasive rat, which assists in the spread of rat lung disease, is also a concern.
6. Plants, invasive species and the need for financial assistance for herbaceous weed control and woody brush control on our cropland due to our yearlong growing climate.

The most critical resource concern was soil, healthy soil. There is concern that after decades of over use of herbicides and fertilizers that the soil has been badly damaged. The excessive herbicide use can be seen on farms that no longer have soil. The use of herbicide to control weeds has removed a major source of organic matter that would have contributed to the soil. Without vegetation on our soils the organic matter will volatilize into the atmosphere leaving the rocks behind. Because of the fractured nature of our soils this overuse of chemicals also causes concern for our groundwater.

Another barrier to healthy soil is feral ungulates, the feral pig particularly. The feral pig loves healthy soil and if they have access to it they are likely to damage it. The feral pigs till our soil and denude the land making our soil extremely vulnerable to erosion. Because the average slope on land in North and South Kona is 13% the vulnerability of soil loss due to erosion is even more significant.

Water was the next most critical resource concern. Quality concern for our water resources stems from the over application of herbicides and fertilizer. There is also concern regarding quantity of water. Many of our producers do not have access to a municipal water supply so their water resources are limited to their holding capacity for rainwater. Our producers do not understand why ranchers without access to municipal water can obtain catchment tanks through NRCS financial assistance programs, but farmers cannot. The KSWCD could not provide an answer to that.

Invasive species were also a great concern regarding our natural resources. Invasive plants as well as animals, though it is believed the animals, particularly the pig, are a driving force in the expansion of non-native invasive plants. Other invasive animals are the Little Fire Ant and the Coffee Berry Borer. Invasive plants are a large problem particularly for individuals who acquire cropland that has not been managed for six months or longer. The volume of invasive plant material is sometimes too overwhelming for new farmers. It is believed, due to our tropical climate (growing season on our cropland does not end) that there are instances where financial assistance to deal with herbaceous weed and woody brush on cropland would be appropriate.

Concerns regarding air quality were around chemical drift, herbicides and other pesticides. Wind erosion is another concern around our air quality. The wind erosion can create a very dusty environment. We continue to have problems with poor air quality due to our active volcano. It is understood we must let the volcano run its course but it does have a detrimental effect on our air quality. There are some producers, protea flower growers particularly, that do have to address the vog

on their farm. To date, protea growers generally install overhead irrigation systems so that the plants can be “rinsed” on a regular basis.

In conclusion, our resource concerns in order of severity or priority for being addressed are as follows:

1. Soil Health
2. Soil Erosion
3. Water quantity
4. Water quality
5. Animals, invasive species, particularly the pig (farmers struggle to develop healthy soil if pigs are destroying it). The invasive semi-slug and its relationship with the invasive rat, which assists in the spread of rat lung disease, is also a concern.
6. Plants, invasive species and the need for financial assistance for herbaceous weed control and woody brush control on our cropland due to our yearlong growing climate. For example, someone takes over a Kamehameha Schools’ lease on land that has been unmanaged for any significant length of time has an incredible herbaceous weed and/or a woody brush problem growing over existing orchard trees. We do not have a killing frost, like so much of the country, that will take care of the problem.