

PROFILES IN soil health



Mr. Seizen Bonk

Waimea, Hawaii

20 acres

Crops: sweet corn, lettuce, cabbage, beets, burdock, carrots, onions, and peppers

Planting: cover crops

Covers: organic farming

Seizen Bonk with Matthew Wung (right)

Local Farmer Banks on Soil Health

Seizen Bonk is an organic farmer from the Big Island of Hawaii who began farming in 1974 in Mountain View. Mr. Bonk now farms in Kamuela, Hawaii and currently farms over 20 acres of mixed vegetable crops that include: carrots, onions, bell peppers, cabbage, lettuce, corn, broccoli, squash, beans, and potatoes. Mr. Bonk learned to farm conventionally using various chemical fertilizers, herbicide, fungicides, and pesticides. He always planted cover crops and knows the importance of soil health.

Making the Change

Mr. Bonk said, "I stopped using chemical pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides after it was affecting my health." To manage pests, he now implements a strategy of pest resistant crops and inter plants crops to confuse insects while enhancing his crop bio

"Soil is a living part of this earth. Care for it as such without concern for money."

- Seizen Bonk, landowner

diversity. In addition, he plants "extra" for the bugs and leaves weedy areas for beneficial insects as well. Mr. Bonk made the change from chemical fertilizers to organic manures at the suggestion of Soil Conservationist Laila Jayyousi of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). He has not regretted making that change. He adds organic matter to his soil by incorporating crop



USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

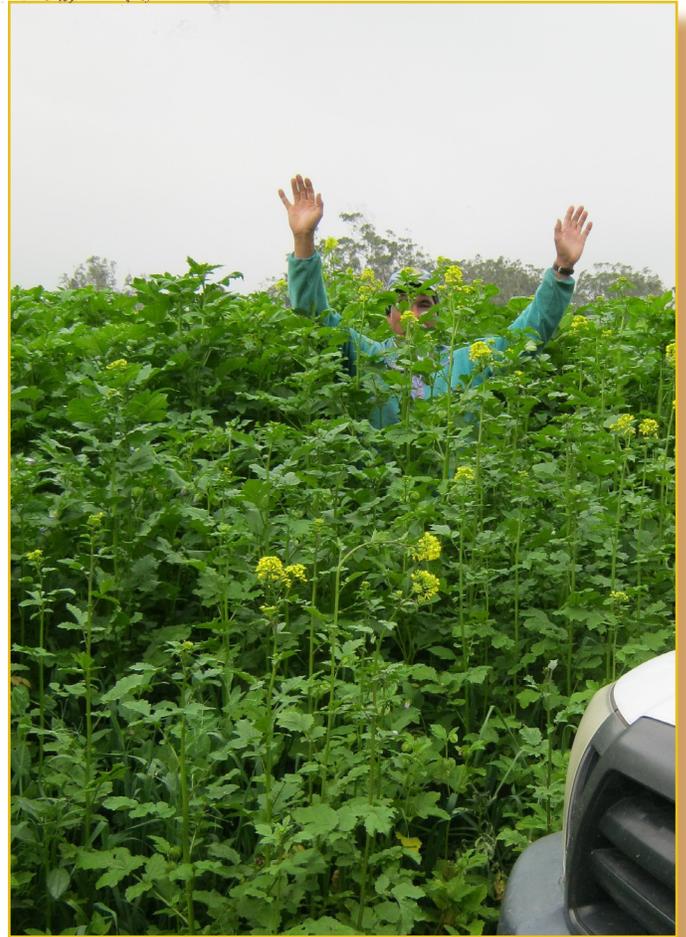
residues and by using organic fertilizers. He relates his inputs to a bank account in which deposits are made and withdrawals are taken out by crops. The interest or organic matter in the soil is always building up with each deposit and there is always a positive balance in his "soil" account. Even though the labor to apply organic fertilizers is much higher than chemical fertilizers, Bonk finds the results of his crop growth are more productive and much more economical than conventional farming.

The Practices

Mr. Bonk believes in bio-diversity, both in the crops he is planting for harvest as well as his choice of cover crops. Some of the cover crops that Mr. Bonk uses are sun hemp, buckwheat, mustard, Sudan grass, and rye grass in a mix or sometimes by itself. In addition to cover crops and crop rotation, Mr. Bonk implemented deep tillage to break up an existing hard pan that was discovered during a NRCS soil health test. This practice not only helped improve drainage, but helped him have the best crop of burdock to date. Mr. Bonk is largely self-taught and is constantly reading and learning new practices. He feels that anyone who wants to farm should work for an established farmer and most importantly, learn to be a disciplined person.

Farming for Health

Farming organically has made Mr. Bonk a happier person as he feels good about what he is doing and how he is taking care of the land. He feels it is great to have a NRCS Soil Conservationist that works with him and knows his farm so he can get personalized conservation planning assistance.



Seizen Bonk standing in his mustard cover crop.

Contact

Matthew Wung, NRCS District Conservationist in Waimea at (808) 885-6602 or Matthew.Wung@hi.usda.gov.



Go to: www.pia.nrcs.usda.gov