



PACIFIC ISLANDS AREA

PROFILES IN soil health

Mr. Chris Robb
Waimea, Hawaii

Crop: leeks, lettuce, and broccoli
Practice: cover crop and drip irrigation

Organic Farmer

Cover Crops for Soil Health

Chris Robb is an organic farmer from the Big Island of Hawaii who began Robb Farms in 1993.

Making the Change

Historically, he used compost because it kept the soil fertility up and worked well with his system of vegetable cropping. Now, Robb is experimenting with different cover crop mixes. A lot of research has been done for the subtropical lower elevations, but Robb Farms is almost a sub-temperate climate with definitive seasons. The soil temperatures are cooler, and the variety of plants that can be grown are quite different. The soil max builder Robb likes is a combination of cayuse oats, bell beans, Austrian peas, and purple vetch that work very well. The resulting compost is a stable form with a longer

"Soil health and land stewardship are one in the same. You leave the land better than how you found it."

- Chris Robb, Waimea Farmer

residual effect.

The Practices

Chris Robb says that he could not have afforded to update his irrigation system alone. Re-doing the entire main line was a big undertaking, and when he started out he had a shoe string budget. "Without the assistance from NRCS, there's no way I could have pulled it off.



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What a great outfit! NRCS is one government agency that people really like because you're actually out there to help the farmer and rancher improve their land. NRCS helps people do a better job," said Chris Robb.

In addition to drip irrigation, Robb Farms utilizes composting and cover cropping to build soil health. Both practices allow Chris to improve soil fertility, reduce inputs and increase microbial activity.

Farming for Health

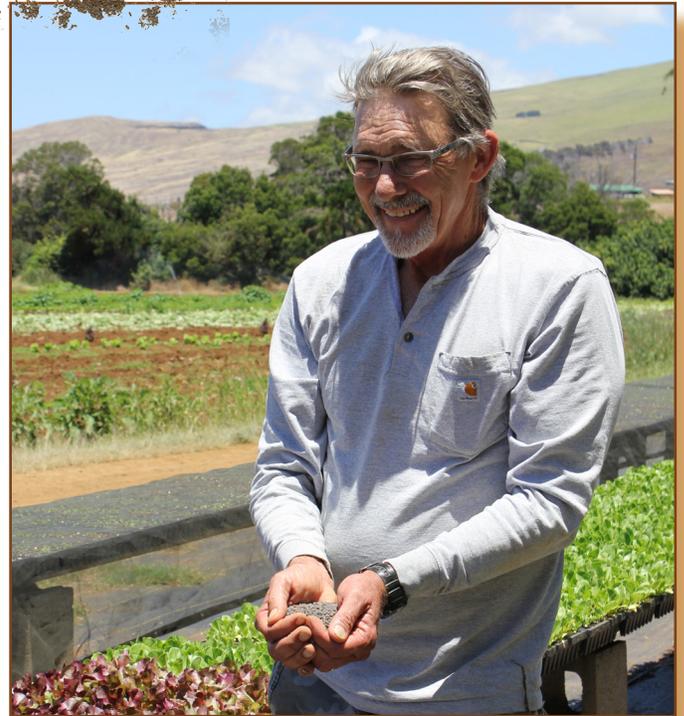
The feedback Chris gets from his customers is that they really like Robb Farms products because they get a better shelf life. "We have a shelf life that conventional vegetables just doesn't have," he said.

For Chris, healthy soil equals a healthy populous. He is proud to say that his farm does not have the chemical residues that can result from traditional farming methods. Instead of spraying for pests, Robb Farms attracts beneficial insects such as wasps, lacewings, hover flies, and lady bird beetles. In addition, his crops do much better than conventional farms with increased carbon and living microbial activity in the soil.

Soil Health is a more than a philosophy to Chris, it's how he farms. "It's better for my workers, it's healthier for my consumers, and, I like to leave the land better than I find it," he said.

Contact

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*Chris Robb with seeds for his lettuce crop (above).
Mulching builds soil and retains moisture (below).*



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