



Craig Derickson, Acting Director (center) led one of the roundtable sessions to collect input from our farmers, ranchers, and agency partners.

Farmers and Ranchers voiced their concerns.

By: Jolene Lau, State Public Affairs Specialist

The Farm Foundation held a Soil and Water Resources Conservation Act (RCA) roundtable in Kunia recently to collect valuable input from farmers and ranchers in the islands. The Farm Foundation has a cooperative agreement with NRCS to assist with the statutorily mandated public participation phase of the RCA. More than 40 producers and agency partners came together for a productive session on addressing conservation on our islands' natural resources.

"We had key stakeholders at our session and it was an incredible opportunity to acquire their input," stated Craig Derickson, NRCS Acting Director in the Pacific Islands Area. "We appreciate the time they took out of their busy schedule to help us."

Participants gathered at the Hawaii Agriculture Research Center in Kunia and brainstormed ideas on soil health, water resource management, and the resilience of soil and water resources to climate change and extreme weather events on farms and ranches in the region. Speakers included Dr. Rich MacKenzie and Dr. Christian Giardina both from the U.S. Forest Service; and Dr. Jonathan Deenik, from the University of Hawaii.

"This was an excellent turn out," said Tim Brennan, Farm Foundation's Director of Development. "We are hearing some very interesting concerns raised here."

The conservation perspectives and solutions will be brought back to U.S. Department of Agriculture leaders and Congress through a national forum scheduled for early 2015. The information will also inform the next RCA Appraisal, scheduled for release in early 2016. For more information, visit www.farmfoundation.org or www.nrcs.usda.gov.

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- Tim Brennan, Director of Development, Farm Foundation



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

I have had the privilege of serving as the Acting Director for the Pacific Islands Area for almost three months now and it has been a very rewarding experience for me. I have had the opportunity to meet many terrific employees and see first hand the services they provide to land users to get conservation on the land. My recent experiences here in the PIA add to the pride and admiration that I have for our agency. We are the premier natural resource agency among all Federal agencies and we should be bold in our conservation efforts to help our clients plan and apply conservation measures.

I know you are all anxious to hear news about the new permanent Director. I anticipate there will be a selection and announcement in the very near future. I hope 2015 will be a year of growth and new opportunities for employees in the PIA. There are many positive things happening in PIA operations and I am certain there is more to come. I have seen several good programmatic and technical procedure adjustments in the last three months that can help expand conservation activities with your producers here on the islands.

I look forward to a few more experiences here in PIA, and I am pleased to be able to work constructively with the Leadership Team to make decisions that will move PIA forward to a new era of robust conservation. We have many things to look forward to in 2015, including a new Administrative team through the Administrative Transformation project, a new Farm Bill to implement, and many more technical and technological advancements that can help us get more conservation on the land.

Best wishes for an exciting new year,

Craig Derickson



Craig Derickson (center) with Josh Guth (left), a Hawaiian native with a new EQIP contract and Ranae Ganske-Cerizo (right), Kahului District Conservationist.

UH Manoa Receives CIG to Help Farmers with Soil Health

By: Jolene Lau, State Public Affairs Specialist

Recipients of this year's Conservation Innovation Grants will demonstrate methods that improve soil health, air and water quality, conserve energy, and enhance wildlife habitat in balance with productive agricultural systems.

"Conservation Innovation Grants activate creativity and problem-solving to benefit conservation-minded farmers and ranchers," said Craig Derickson, Acting Director for the Pacific Islands Area. "These grants are critical in sparking new ideas and techniques for conservation on America's private lands and strengthening rural communities. Everyone relies on our nation's natural resources for food, fiber and clean water and will benefit from these grants."

Seven of the approved grants support conservation technologies and approaches to help farmers and ranchers who historically have not had equal access to agricultural programs because of race or ethnicity, or who have limited resources, or who are beginning farmers and ranchers.



Craig Derickson, Acting Director (right) presents a Certificate of Appreciation to officials from the University of Hawaii's CTAHR Cooperative Extension. From the left, Ray Uchida is the Oahu County Administrator; Ken Grace is the Associate Dean; and Koon Hui Wang is the Assistant Professor.

Of the 47 grants announced nationally, one is for the University of Hawaii.

The University of Hawaii received \$474,043 to promote the use of Cover Crop Calculator for the Tropics as Nitrogen Management Tool and the use of Cover Crops for Soil Health Management Guideline. Specifically, leguminous cover crops can contribute significant amount of nitrogen to crop production. However, farmers need a better tool to accurately estimate the nitrogen contribution from legumes so as to precisely reduce fertilizer rates. A simple calculator to address this issue was developed for Idaho and Oregon with high success rate. This project will expand on this proven technology and modify it for tropical climates and soil types in the Pacific Islands. To make the calculator more precise, variation of nutrient availability when the leguminous cover crops were mixed with graminaceous cover crops or followed by till or no-till cropping systems will also be taken into consideration. The overall goal of this project is to increase the incentive for farmers in Hawaii and the Pacific Islands to adopt cover cropping into their farming systems.

A full list of CIG recipients is available at:

www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/cig/.

The grants are funded through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Grantees must work with producers and forestland owners to develop and demonstrate the new technologies and approaches. At least 50 percent of the total cost of CIG projects must come from non-federal matching funds, including cash and in-kind contributions provided by the grant recipient.

NRCS offered this grant program since 2004, investing in ways to demonstrate and transfer efficient and environmentally friendly farming and ranching. In the past years, the grants have helped develop trading markets for water quality and have shown how farmers and ranchers may use fertilizer, water and energy more efficiently.

Embassy Staff Tour Six Demonstration Gardens

By Arlene Rosenkrans, Resource Conservationist, Pohnpei

On November 20, DCM Hugues Ogier and other Embassy staff were shown six farms that are important models for agricultural development on Pohnpei by Arlene Rosenkrans of USDA NRCS.

The first was a small family farm that focused on livestock, including pigs, chickens, ducks, goats, and even had three deer as pets. The animal wastes all fed into an anaerobic digester system to produce gas and compost.

Second they visited a model farm funded by Chinese aid that focused on tunnel greenhouse production of vegetables and melons, with plots for local families to learn and grow marketable produce. The farm also is developing oyster mushroom production in a darkened storage facility.

Next, the group visited the pepper farm of Uemoto Sei, an octogenarian Japanese farmer that has been on Pohnpei since his childhood during WWII. Pepper exports were a rapidly growing business ten years ago, but fell into decline due to government intervention and export distribution changes. Sei is now working to revive his pepper plantation.

A small successful family farm that has adopted NRCS methods including drip irrigation, propagation, raised beds and chicken tractors was the next visit, followed by a visit to the dry litter demonstration pig farm at the College of Micronesia.

The final visit was to Saimon Mix's commercial production farm that combined all of the current low cost high impact technologies used in the other farms, and is the first to use a gravity-fed hydraulic ram pump to raise water from a local stream to the fields on a hill without any form of external power.



Hugues Ogier and Bill Cook view pepper cultivation on Sei's farm.



A raft is currently the only way to cross the river to reach Saimon Mix's farm.

Breaking Ground on a New School Garden

By Pauline Sato, Executive Director of the Malama Learning Center

It seems that gardens are now emerging at a number of schools in Kapolei and we are happy to help this trend grow! Last month, we broke ground on a new garden at Kapolei Middle School (KMS), thanks to a Cooperative Agreement from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the KMS Garden Club. Teachers Scott La Chance, Nicole Maraglio, and Tino Gonsalves are spear-heading this effort and we are providing technical support. La Chance writes, "The KMS Community Garden Club has been fortunate that so many are pitching in to nurture our relationship with the Earth here. At KMS, the Math Club, Art Club, Industrial Arts are all giving time and talents to the garden project." Our students are eager to hear from NRCS and Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) specialists throughout the year. We look forward to the fruits of their labor!



Photo by Jolene Lau: Phenomenal partnership with John McHugh, SWCD (center); Bernadette Luncsford, Aiea District Conservationist; Tony Ingersoll, Assistant Director for Technology; and Pauline Sato, Executive Director of Malama Learning Center with Kapolei Middle School faculty and staff at the new garden's ground-breaking event.

EQIP Success Story - Kupa'a Farms

By Carl Hashimoto, Soil Conservation Technician, Kahului



Pictured here is the Cover Crop mixture of Sunn Hemp and Sudan Grass being mowed and incorporated in the Season High Tunnel which was cost-shared through the EQIP Farm Bill Program. The high tunnel is at Kupa'a Farms in Kula, Maui, owned by Gerry Ross who converted his farm from Conventional to Organic farming. Gerry's problem before farming in the Seasonal High Tunnel was controlling insects (pepper weevil, melon fly, pickle worm and even birds) that attacked his crops. Another challenge Gerry faced was not being able to utilize the entire square footage for farming. The curvature of the sides makes them inaccessible to the tractor for cultivation. Creatively, Gerry laid weed mats along each of the sides and grows ginger in containers to make use of the before wasted space.

The Seasonal High Tunnel really makes tremendous difference farming on Maui. Gerry Ross has had much success farming in the high tunnel. Customers from individuals to chefs were very impressed with the quality of produce that is grown in the structure.

Tree & Shrub Establishment in Kona's Native Dryland Forest

By Jessica Schmelz, District Conservationist, Kealahou

The Kealahou Field Office is experiencing a significant increase in the number of clients seeking assistance with restoring native habitat, particularly dryland forests and shrublands. These low elevation areas are subject to extremely challenging conditions including high temperatures, scant rainfall and poor soil. Restoring a functioning ecosystem starts with choosing the appropriate species and depends upon providing them with adequate care until they are established. To provide better advice to these clients our planners need to be familiar with the native species used in outplantings and the conditions they require to be successful.

To augment their ongoing forestry training, Soil Conservationists Bernard Vermeulen and Laura Nelson recently rolled up their sleeves and participated in a 9-11 commemorative volunteer planting day at the West Hawai'i Veteran's Cemetery, one of Kona's major dryland forest restoration sites. While clearing invasive species from a hillside that had been previously restored they worked around some well-known species which are standbys on our jobsheets, including 'a'alii, kou, pohinahina, 'ilima, ulei, 'ilie'e, and 'akia, noting their growth form, height, compatibility, deficiencies, and pest damage. At the same time they had the opportunity to get acquainted with some less familiar ones such as maiapilo, kulū'i, and pā'ūohi'iaka. Plant experts from the University of Hawai'i and the Division of Forestry and Wildlife (Pu'u Wa'awa'a Forest Reserve) were on hand to provide useful background information. This firsthand experience will enable them to better communicate to their clients about the plants that often appear on their lists of recommended species.



Native tree-planting at the new POW MIA memorial grove.



Trees and shrubs established at the West Hawai'i Veteran's Cemetery.

Emerging Leaders Experience

By: Jared Considine, Soil Conservationist, Waimea Service Center

Aloha,

I had a great experience the first session of the PLA Emerging Leaders course. We received our OPM 360 assessments back from multiple colleagues, supervisors (past and/or present), and direct reports.

The results of that were very helpful for me to understand how I am being perceived in the daily workplace and how much others either appreciated my manager vs. leader capabilities or gave feedback on how they thought I could improve.

Each day students were able to pair with a “clock partner” to brainstorm the course exercises and reflect on all the concepts overall. A clock partner was just one of 12 participants in the course we introduced ourselves to in the first few minutes on the first day. We then had them as clock partners the rest of the week.

Several exercises required us all to get in groups to work on interactive team building course projects and challenge assignments.

A few of the many highlights for me were the concepts of emotional intelligence, judgment ladders, and realizing “that people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care”.

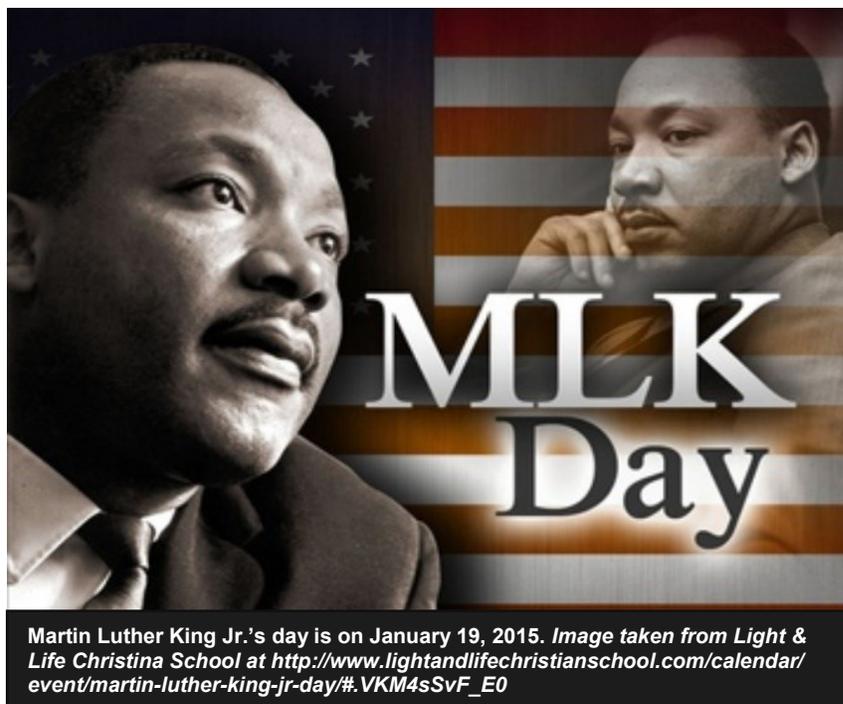
The required research papers, book reports, and Individual development plans are now due the next time we meet in April and we all have a volunteer mentor who are PLA alumni to help guide us.

My supervisor has allowed me to take time out of my regular duties to complete these assignments along with my normal workload although I plan to do much of the work at home. That is a critical factor for anyone who applies and it’s something that is taken pretty seriously by the course organizers at the Federal Executive Board in Honolulu. Basically we are on notice to get all this stuff done.

I’m grateful for being one of the staff selected from PIA and would encourage other staff to apply.

Civil Rights Advisory Committee

***February is
African American
Heritage Month!***



Olomana High School Takes Top Honors at Oahu's Conservation Awareness Contest

By Jolene Lau, State Public Affairs Specialist

Oahu's Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) partnered with NRCS to host the Oahu Conservation Awareness Contest in Kunia. With the support of Hawaii Agricultural Research Center (HARC), high school students from across the island came with their teachers to compete for cash prizes.

"Participation in the Conservation Awareness Contest is an excellent exercise for students who are looking at a career in agriculture and engineering, the cornerstones of Land Grant colleges in the U.S.," said John McHugh of the West Oahu SWCD.

"We are extremely gratified that so many schools have chosen to participate since this is a sound foundation for the next generation of agricultural leaders in Hawaii," said Karen Ah Mai of the South Oahu SWCD. "We are so pleased to see our youth involved with soil science and conservation," said Craig Derickson, Acting Director for the NRCS.

There were three different land-use sites prepared on the HARC property in Kunia. Students had a series of questions to answer and each score card was graded for 100 total points. Some of the questions involved the study of slope, soil texture, land-use, and natural resource concerns. Students also heard from specialists on soil science, natural resource management, and careers in conservation. Generous financial support was provided by the West Oahu SWCD. Volunteer support also provided by nearby farms of Syngenta, DuPont Pioneer, and Monsanto Hawaii.

Congratulations to Olomana High School for winning the individual top scorer and team group score! We also recognize the teachers and students from Leilehua, Castle, and Waipahu high schools that competed in the Oahu contest. Best wishes to the state winners that will represent us well in the National competition.



Tony Rolfes gave a presentation to the students on soils, followed by a presentation on careers with NRCS.



From the left, Tony Rolfes (NRCS) and John McHugh (SWCD) present a certificate and prize to the students and teachers of Olomana High School as the First Place Team Winner during the Oahu contest.



Tony Rolfes, NRCS (left) and John McHugh, SWCD (right) present a certificate and prize to Jamez Kalima of Olomana High School as the First Place Individual Winner during the Oahu contest.



Site of a soil pit during the Oahu Conservationist Awareness Contest at the Hawaiian Agriculture Research Center in Kunia.

Employee Spotlight

By Tracy Sakato, Human Resources Specialist

Happy New Year! As 2015 begins, it reminds me that change is constant and new and exciting things are always around the corner. However, before looking to the future, I'd like to take a moment to reflect on the past. Serving our NRCS Pacific Islands Area employees, affiliates and applicants for the past six years has been a privilege and pleasure. I've gotten to know many different employees by providing administrative support in human resources (HR) functions such as: staffing, onboarding, benefits, leave, pay and compensation, training, performance management and employee relations. My title is Human Resources Specialist but I'm also responsible for HR generalist work: anything that falls under the HR umbrella. I truly enjoy my work and plan to continue until the Administrative Transformation is complete.

At this time, I'd like to take this wonderful opportunity to shed some light on the Administrative Transformation process. One of the many driving forces for the NRCS Administrative Transformation is to streamline processes and ensure consistency across the nation. As an agency, we are moving from individual state administrative units (in areas of Financial Management, HR and Contracting) to national service delivery teams. Each administrative unit will be comprised of four functional areas.

Human resources functional areas consist of Staffing and Workforce Management, Benefits, Performance, Pay and Recognition and Employee and Labor Relations. Financial management functional areas consist of Financial Administration, Budget Support, Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable. Contracting functional areas consist of Contracting, Grants and Agreements, Real Property and Personal Property. Current details are underway to set up the processes for each functional national service delivery team. The actual date for the permanent placement on national teams is unknown at this time but once the process is finalized, the existing administrative staff (Administrative Officer, Contracting and HR staff) will be realigned to one of the national teams. Meaning, we will be physically present in a PIA office but our focus will be in a specialty of our field, and we will likely service other states alongside PIA.

Under this new administrative structure, the need for local support in each state prompted the recruitment for an Assistant Director for Business Management and Strategy, Business Services Specialist and Financial Resources Specialist. These three positions will provide local support for budget allocation and expenditures, business operations and administrative services necessary to accomplish the mission responsibilities of PIA and NRCS.

With this new and exciting transformation on the horizon, I humbly ask for your patience and understanding. There may be a learning curve and challenges as we transition and define the roles and responsibilities of local support and national service delivery staff, but again, change can bring new and exciting things. I look forward to continuing to serve NRCS and PIA through my permanent placement on a national service delivery team and thank you for your patience and support.



2014 VOLUNTEER STATUS REPORT

Pacific Islands Area

These numbers represent real people helping NRCS field staff implement conservation practices and programs in Fiscal Year 2014.



* The value of each hour of volunteer service is estimated at \$22.55 per hour

HIGHLIGHTS

In the Pacific Islands Area, seven offices are utilizing Earth Team Volunteers.

Great job and thank you to the following offices:

- * Aiea (two active volunteers)
- * Kamuela (five active volunteers)
- * Plant Materials Center (one group of five volunteers)
- * Pohnpei (one active volunteer plus three occasional students)
- * Saipan (one active plus four occasional students)
- * West Area Office and Guam (one active volunteer plus one student)

Group Kupu volunteered a total of 200 hours to the Plant Materials Center in FY14.

Craig Derickson, Acting Director

Wishing You All the Best in 2015!

Personnel Update

Incoming:

- ◆ Craig Derickson, Acting Director. EOD: 10/6/2014
- ◆ Jessica Ludgate, Soil Conservationist, Pago Pago, American Samoa (vice: Saumweber). EOD: 07/15/2014
- ◆ Jason Peel, Business Management Leader, Honolulu, Hawaii. EOD: 11/16/2014 (virtual until mid-January 2015)

Outgoing:

- ◆ Lehua Angay, resignation 11/15/2014
- ◆ Mark Defley, transfer to NRCS Tennessee 11/30/2014
- ◆ Preston Irwin, transfer to NRCS Texas 12/14/2014
- ◆ Richard Patterson, transfer to NRCS California 11/02/2014
- ◆ Lester Suehiro, retirement 12/31/2014

Awards:

- ◆ Length of Service - 40 years: Michael Bajinting
- ◆ Length of Service - 35 years: Tony Rolfes
- ◆ Length of Service - 30 years: Diego Ayala and Kurencio Ngowaki
- ◆ Length of Service - 25 years: Timothy Brasuell, Robin Kelley, Douglas Maguire and Colleen Simpson
- ◆ Length of Service - 20 years: Mike Kolman
- ◆ Length of Service - 5 years: Michael Constantinides and Ryan Woolbright

*From our family
to yours,
Happy Holidays!*

