

Resource Kona

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Summer/Fall 2018

KONA SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

With SWCD Help NRCS Distributes Almost 5 Million dollars to Improve Natural Resources on the Big Island

The federal fiscal year runs from October 1st through September 30th each year so we are at the beginning of the 2019 federal fiscal year. During the 2018 fiscal year NRCS provided almost 5 million dollars of financial assistance to producers on the Big Island.

FO	Total \$ for Selected Applications
Hilo	\$2,053,218.00
Kealahou	\$1,625,001.00
Waimea	\$1,151,171.00

These funds help ranchers install cross fencing and watering facilities for their herds. Cross fencing and watering facilities actually mitigate erosion. The cross fencing focuses a herd's grass consumption to one field at a time. It gives the other fields a chance to rest and regrow the forage that had been consumed.

Farmers growing crops were provided engineering designs and the financial resources to install a new irrigation system that is better than what they currently have.

Forest land owners, with the goal of creating wildlife habitat, were provided financial assistance and the specifications to install a high quality fence to eliminate feral swine access and to plant more native plant species. Wildlife habitat must address a wildlife species needs from birth to death.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD) provide a lot of assistance to NRCS and the local agricultural community. SWCD staffers do many of the same tasks as NRCS staffers. The major difference in the type of assistance you can obtain has to do with funding. The state's SWCDs do not have a funding source that can provide financial assistance but we, the SWCD staffers, do site visits, planning, outreach and general map making. We also host and assist with County Conservation Awareness Contests and the State Conservation Awareness contest and general administrative duties for each all-volunteer board of directors.



Photos, left and right, are from a reforestation project in S. Kona.



Mulch on the left and conservation cover on the right, two best practices for building soil.



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Special points of interest:

- Kona SWCD meetings take place the second Thursday of the month from 8am-10am and you are invited.
- This newsletter is produced with funding from the Hawaii County Department of Research and Development

Environmental Quality Incentives Program — EQIP — For FY 2019

For this federal fiscal year, which started on October 1st, NRCS will have a sign up deadline much later in the year. The actual date has not been determined and the reason for that is because Congress has not passed a Farm Bill to send to the President yet.

NRCS is preparing for major administrative changes to the program regarding the processes the staff uses to prepare and manage conservation plans so staff training will probably be necessary to implement the program. There are also likely to be other changes. They will be determined by an analysis of the final bill by folks in Washington DC. These folks draft the rules that have to be followed by those participating. For instance, to be deemed eligible there is an AGI rule that requires you earn than \$900,000 adjusted gross income for each of the last three year. That could change. There has been a rule in place requiring 60% of EQIP funding go to livestock/forage/pasture type land uses leaving, 40% of the funding for forestry and crop land uses. That could change too, we simply do not know at this time.

Even though the application deadline is not around the corner you can, ***and should***, start working on a conservation plan now. Conservation plans are helpful in their own right by keeping you on track for making improvements to your land. The financial assistance is huge for most people but the plan does come first. Without the plan there is no financial assistance so contact your local NRCS/SWCD office and get the process underway by developing your conservation plan.

To make the conversation with a Soil Conservationist more productive there are things you should think about:

- * What is your current land use? Crop, pasture, forest or a mixture of two or three?
- * What is your goal for your land? What do you want to see happen to your land?
- * Can you increase your yields? Cut down on labor costs? (With a plan, it could be possible)
- * What do you think your limitations are for completing any project you may have wanted to attempt? In essence, why hasn't a particular project for your land been implemented? Manpower limits, general knowledge or technological limits, financial limits?
- * How much time do you want to spend or have available for working your land or managing others doing the work on your land? Think of this in hours per week or month. If you have a full time job off the farm, and many people do, the time you have for your farm is limited.
- * ***Do not forget your family...budget time for them too...it's one rule that will never change.***

Hilo NRCS Office
154 Waiianuenu Ave.
Hilo, HI 96720

District Conservationist:
Kori Hisashami,
808-933-8359

District Contact:
Jennifer Lopez-Reavis,
808-933-8350

Kealahou NRCS Office
81-948 Waena Oihana Loop
Kealahou, HI 96750

District Conservationist:
Jessica Schmelz*
808-339-9069

District Contact:
Mary Robblee
808-339-9042

Waimea (Kamuela) NRCS Office
67-1185 Mamalahoa Hwy.
Hilo, HI 96720

District Conservationist:
Jessica Schmelz*
808-339-9069

District Contact:
Alyssa Fujii
808-885-6602 exr 100

*Due to staffing shortages and limited hiring approvals within the federal government Jessica Schmelz is temporarily the District Conservationist for two offices, Kealahou and Waimea. The District Conservationist position for the Waimea Office is expected to be filled within the next few months.

Wildlife Wonders, The Hawaiian Stilt, the Ae`o



The Hawaiian Stilt, known locally as the Ae`o, enjoy living around coastal wetlands. It has a white underside and is black on top, with a long thin black bill and slender pink legs.

This bird's foraging habitat includes ephemeral fresh, brackish or salt water habitat. Water depth and vegetation density are important. The water depth has to be less than 9 inches (24 cm) with limited or low growing vegetation. Their preferred menu includes polychaeta worm, small crabs, insects and small fish.

Their nesting habitat includes mudflats or small islands in fresh or brackish ponds, which makes the Koloko Honokohau National Historic Park, where these photos were taken, the perfect place for them.

Nesting takes place between March and August and they usually have three to four eggs in a clutch with an incubation period of approximately 24 days. The chicks are able to leave the nest shortly after hatching but stay with their parents for several months.

The Ae`o was a popular game bird and hunting contributed to the decline in the bird's population until it was prohibited in 1939. Another cause of the decline in the species population is due to habitat loss. Since about 1900, more than 30% of the coastal plain wetlands have been lost.

Introduced predators, such as dogs, cats, rats, mongoose, cattle egrets, barn owls and bull frogs have all caused population losses. Their native predators include the Hawaiian hawk, the Hawaiian short eared owl and black-crowned night herons, the `auku`u. Introduced plants like pickleweed, water hyacinth and mangroves reduce open water, mudflats and shallows. The avian disease of botulism affects this species and the environmental contaminant most likely to have an impact are fuel and oil spills.

The information source for this article was *Hawaii's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, October 1, 2005*. The photo credit is to Lois Robblee, Peabody, MA.



Cooperator of the Year for 2017

Each year the Kona SWCD Board of Directors has a group of nominees for Cooperator of the Year from which to choose the cream of the crop. Every year this process proves to be a challenge...who is the best of the best?

The Kona SWCD Board accepts nominations from NRCS and the district staff. This year's nominees included, as Farmer of the Year, Ken Verosko and the South Kona Fruit Stand. There is a 6 acre fruit farm behind the fruit stand and it produces most of the fruits and vegetables sold at the stand. Sandra Scarr and the Scarr Family Farm, an almost 9 acre coffee farm that has incorporated a small native forest (approx. 2 ac) and native plantings throughout the orchards, was nominated for Agro-forestry and Mary Prevetz was nominated for forestry work as well.

The board ultimately decided the South Kona Fruit Stand and the Scarr Family Farm would receive the honors. The Prevetz farm, though beautiful and well maintained, had only recently completed their planting projects and the board wants to see how they do over the next few years.

To honor our award winners we have a picnic which is often held at one of the winner's farms. This year the picnic event was held at the S. Kona Fruit Stand and we all had a wonderful time.



Top Left: Greg Hendrickson, Kona SWCD Chairperson, awards Ken Verosko his Farmer of the Year sign. Top Center: Greg is reading the award certificate from Senator Schatz's office. Top right: Ken Verosko and his partner Beth.

Below left: Greg is awarding Sandra Scarr with the certificate from Senator Schatz's office. Below center: Greg is awarding Sandra her sign. Below right: Sandra holds up her certificate from Senator Schatz.



2018 Annual HACD Conference

The Kona SWCD hosted the 2018 Hawaii Association of Conservation Districts' (HACD) annual conference. It was held at the Royal Kona Resort. The format of the conference calls for speakers on day 1, an agricultural tour on day 2 and the HACD Executive Council meeting is held on day 3.

We had a wide range of speakers including Marissa Harmon, Director of Asset Management for Hawaii Island, representing Kamehameha Schools. She discussed Kamehameha Schools agricultural plan. Travis Thomason, NRCS PIA Director, spoke of partnerships and their importance to conservation efforts.

From the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in Colorado, Francisco Calderon, Ph.D, provided the presentation "Measuring Organic Matter in Soil" and explained how soil organic carbon (SOC) is directly impacted by management practices. This in turn influences the magnitude and rate of carbon storage. He explained the level of stored carbon in soil exceeds carbon stored in the atmosphere and vegetative carbon combined.

Dr. Calderon also covered how the quantification of SOC in soil is one of the most commonly measured soil properties to monitor the impacts of management activities on soil quality. The technique to quantify SOC and observe fluctuation in carbon functional groups is by using Infrared Spectroscopy. Dr. Calderon discussed the importance of a healthy soil's ability to keep carbon stored in the soil. Also, Dr. Calderon showed graphs of the SOC content in some Andisol soils from Big Island and Maui island. The goal is to provide Soil Scientists an additional analytical tool. The soil samples were provided by Jacqueline Vega, Kealakekua Soil Scientist.



Left: Jacqueline Vega, Kealakekua NRCS Soil Scientist (Left) and Francisco Calderon, Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Soil Scientist (right) during the 2018 HACD conference. Jacqueline made the arrangements to contact Francisco Calderon to participate as a speaker in the Annual Conference.

Right: Director Travis Thomason speaks to the group on the changes we can look forward to in the coming months, particularly in the area of technology and how it will impact conservation planning.



The agricultural tour started at a cultural/historic site, the Lekeleke Burial Ground. Monica Frazier, Executive Director for Aloha Kuamo'o `Āina talked to the group about the 1819 Battle of Kuamo'o when Hawaiian forces clashed over maintaining or abolishing the traditional kapu religious system.

We also visited Greenwell Farms and the group was able to see a number of pruning methods used on Greenwell Farm, many developed as a response to the coffee berry borer.

The South Kona Fruit Stand provided an opportunity to visit a farm with many orchard species including coffee, mac nuts, star fruit, mangos, avocados, citrus, tree tomatoes, pomelo and more. The group was impressed with the variety of fruits and with the fruit stand itself and all that it had to offer.

The final stop on the tour was at The Vanillerie located 73-4301 Laui St. in the state agricultural park off of Kaiminani St. We toured where the vanilla beans grow and toured their native forest area. The best part of this site visit was the vanilla ice cream they shared with us. It is made with their vanilla and it tasted smooth and heavenly.

Inexpensive-to-Implement Practices...that really help.

The following is list of inexpensive practices that can be implemented and will benefit your land:

- **Cover Cropping:** A 50lb bag of buckwheat or a 50lb bag sunn hemp seed should each cost less than \$200 delivered to your door or PO box. The seeding rate for each is 60lbs/ac. Annual rye is also a great cover crop for providing a green mulch and organic matter. The seeding rate for annual rye is 40lbs/ac and a 50 lb bag should cost less than \$125.



Cover cropping with sunn hemp and buckwheat. Cover cropping buys time too, if you need to clear a field but can't plant it yet, cover crops protect and improve your soil.

- **Conservation Cover:** The Kona SWCD has tropic lalo available for use as conservation cover. It is a grass species that must be sprigged (it does go to seed but has a 5% viability rate) and we will help you harvest a bag to get you started so this practice could be done with **NO OUT OF POCKET COSTS!!!! AKA: FREE!!!**



Tropic lalo patch, far left, SWCD staffer stands in the middle of the plot. At the time the photo was taken, it had been almost three months since it had last been weed whacked. Tropic lalo is a low maintenance grass.

Left, Mary is in the tropic lalo patch. Center, what tropic lalo would look like to a cat. Right, tropic lalo is a running grass so it grows out much more than up.

- **Mulching:** You can use the county green waste to obtain large quantities of mulch. You hire a hauler to bring 10-20 cubic yards and pay the hauler for their service. You can get smaller quantities by going the transfer station in Kealakehe yourself and hauling a pick-ups worth at a time.
 Consider quarantining and testing the mulch for the Little Fire Ant prior to spreading it on your land.



Left, county mulch on terraces. The mulch is in the process of making soil, moderating soil temperatures, moderating soil moisture loss and controlling weeds. Right, sheet mulch covered with the weeds that used to grow in that spot. Sheet mulch has many of the same benefits as county mulch. Tropic lalo has even started growing on it.

- **Sheet mulch:** This is the use of cardboard, generally, to control weeds. You can simply lay the cardboard on the weeds and that will have some effect. Another way is to weed whack the weeds you want to control, rake the whacked weeds away into a pile, lay down the cardboard, rake the whacked weeds back on top of the cardboard. Depending on the volume of vegetative matter you whacked away you might be able to effectively "hide" the cardboard. You can now plant some tropic lalo sprigs around the cardboard. As the cardboard deteriorates, the ground cover gets established.



For more information, or to apply for any USDA Farm Service Agency program, please call your local USDA Service Center. NOTE: Fees, eligibility requirements, income and payment limitations may apply with any of the programs listed below. Please check with the nearest FSA office for specific rules. The FSA office shares a phone line with Rural Development (RD). Both are in Hilo and can be reached at 933-8381, FSA is ext 2.

FSA Tid-bits

The Farm Service Agency is helping farmers and ranchers negatively impacted by the volcano erupting and by Hurricane Lane. For the hurricane the Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) ECP provides cost share assistance for the following categories:

- EC1 Debris Removal
- EC2 Grading and Shaping
- EC3 Fence Restoration
- EC4 Conservation Structures (Diversions, Pipelines, Installed Drainage Systems, etc)

Hawaii County is eligible for emergency loans following a Presidential Disaster Declaration. Hawaii County was declared a primary disaster due to Kilauea Volcanic Eruption and Earthquakes. Under this designation, producers with operations in any primary or contiguous county are eligible to apply for low interest emergency loans.

Emergency loans help producers recover from production and physical losses due to drought, flooding and other natural disasters or quarantine.

Producers have eight months from the date of the declaration to apply for emergency loan assistance. FSA will consider each loan application on its own merits, taking into account the extent of losses, security available and repayment ability. Producers can borrow up to 100 percent of actual production or physical losses, to a maximum amount of \$500,000.

FSA assumed the responsibility of the Organic Certification Cost Share Program. Previously it was being implemented by the State Department of Agriculture. If you want to learn more about how this cost share program works contact Debbie Jitchaku at 933-8340 or Gail Sandstrom at 933-8369

For more information about these and other programs contact your local FSA office at the phone number noted above or on-line at www.fsa.usda.gov

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81-948 Waena'Oihana Loop
Kealahou, HI 96750
339-9042
Fax: 855-878-2457

Board of Directors:
Chairman: Greg Hendrickson
Vice Chairman: Jeff Knowles
Treasurer: Pepe Miranda
Director: Tom Greenwell
Director: Rick Robinson,

Staff: Mary Robblee, Conservation
Assistant

Monthly meetings are held on the 2nd
Thursday of the month from 8am-
10am at the USDA Kealahou
Service Center below the post office.
All are welcome and the facility is ADA
accessible.

Organization: The Kona Soil and Water Conservation District (KSWCD) is a government subdivision of the State of Hawaii organized under Hawaii State Law, HRS Chapter 180

Function: To utilize available technical, financial and educational resources to focus or coordinate them so that they meet the needs of the local land users with regards to conservation of soil, water, and natural resources.

Service: The District serves the communities and land users within North and South Kona

Why: The District is committed to the promotion of wise land use and resource stewardship.

We are on the web at

www.kswcd.org

An Oldie but a Goodie



The above photograph was taken from the Kealahou USDA office parking lot in December 2010 after a state wide rain event that thoroughly cleaned the air. It was also used in one of our first newsletters. The land mass on the far left is thought to be Oahu. The one in the middle is believed to be Molokai and on the right, Maui.

The middle land mass could be Kahoolawe but it's highest point is only 1,483' whereas Molokai's highest point is 4,961'.

Since the volcanic eruption subsided and the air has become significantly cleaner this view might be more frequent. Water vapor in the form of clouds or fog could hinder the view as well as the salt spray from any white caps on the water's surface.

If you too have any cool photos that you would like to share please feel free to contact the Kona SWCD staff at 339-9042. You get full photo credit and if you are an aspiring photographer and trying to become published you can start here.