

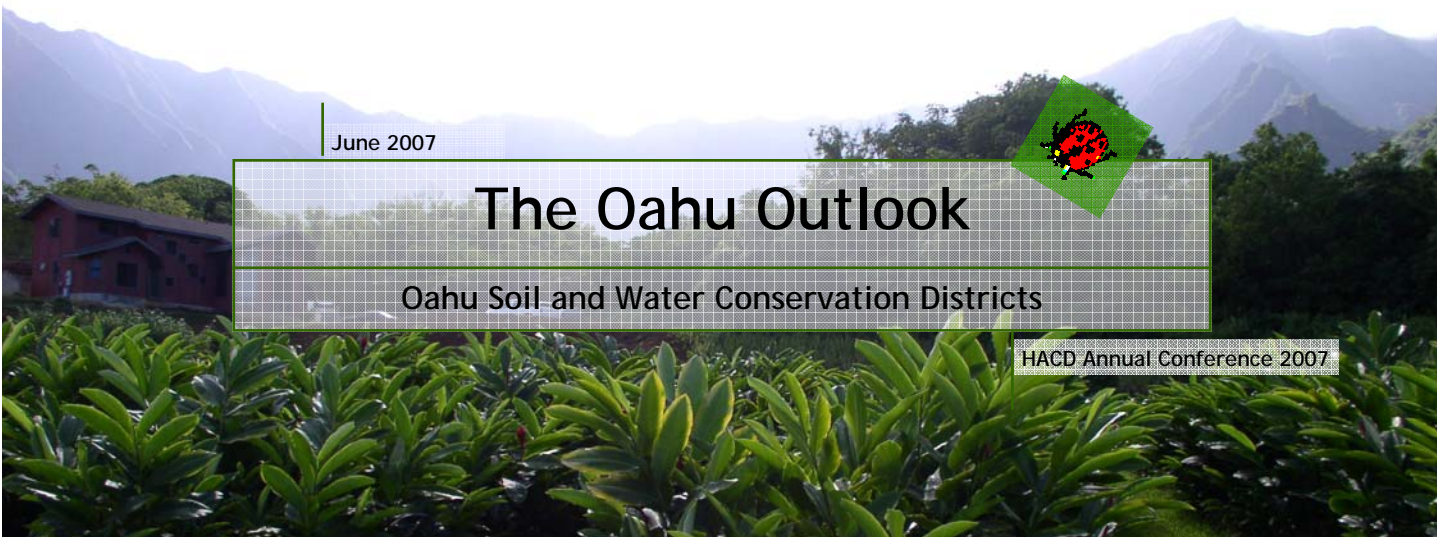
June 2007

# The Oahu Outlook

## Oahu Soil and Water Conservation Districts



HACD Annual Conference 2007



### Oahu SWCDs—Yesterday and Today

The Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs) on Oahu were first established in 1948 by the island's farmers, ranchers, and land users; their goal was to coordinate local efforts in the conservation of soil, water, and other natural resources in our communities.

At present, Oahu has two active SWCDs: West Oahu and Windward Oahu.

The West Oahu SWCD is geographically the largest District on Oahu and includes agricultural areas such as Waianae, Ewa, Kunia, Waialua, and Waimea. In the past, much of this District was farmed by large sugar and pineapple plantations. This year, we saw yet another major change in occupancy as Del Monte left Hawaii. Land use is changing and we are seeing a new diversity of crops in this area, including vegetables, turfgrass, and large areas dedicated to agricultural research. The West Oahu SWCD also has many

smaller producers and most of the remaining livestock operations on the island.

The Windward Oahu SWCD encompasses areas on the windward side of the Koolau Mountains, including Waimanalo, Waiahole, Punaluu, and Kahuku. This district has more Cooperators, generally with smaller acreage than those in the West District. Though nurseries are common, production is very diverse and includes everything from exotic fruits to cattle to shrimp.

There is also a South Oahu SWCD, which is currently inactive. We are looking for people who are interested in reviving this District.



*Remnants of past sugar production still exist on parcels now used for diversified agriculture.*

### Oahu SWCDs Recover from Recent Challenges

Oahu SWCDs have gone through difficult times in the past few years due to scarce funding and urbanization, which has taken a large amount of Oahu's prime agricultural lands. In 2006, a mutual effort between Oahu SWCDs and Oahu Resource

Conservation and Development was made through the Mayor's Office of Economic Development to fund two full-time Conservation Planner positions for the SWCDs. This funding was made available to address the backlog of Conservation

Plans accumulated in the last couple of years. The SWCDs on Oahu are now actively working on a variety of local conservation needs and have significantly renewed their presence in the local agricultural community.

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#### Oahu Farm Statistics

- 794 farms total
- 555 farms where farming is the operator's primary occupation
- Average farm size is 89 acres
- Median farm size is 4 acres!
- 29,103 total cropland acres
- Over \$179 million market value of agricultural products sold
- From 2002 USDA Census of Ag

## New Staff for the Oahu SWCDs!

This year, the Oahu Soil and Water Conservation Districts were fortunate to receive funding that allowed for a major increase in staffing. NRCS and the Oahu RC&D, with financial assistance from the City & County of Honolulu, were able to fund two new Conservation Planner positions for the Districts. These are in addition to the Conservation Specialist position funded through the Hawaii State Department of Health. Our staff works for all SWCDs on Oahu.

Prior to summer 2006, the Oahu SWCDs had only one part-time staff member. We now have three full time



*Oahu SWCD Conservation Specialist Corrin Cunningham and Conservation Planner Jacquie Robson at the State Capitol*

SWCD staff members in the NRCS Aiea field office. Corrin Cunningham is the

Conservation Specialist, spending 100% of her time working for the SWCDs. Guilherme Costa and Jacqueline Robson are Conservation Planners for the Districts. Gill works 90% for the Oahu SWCDs and 10% for the NRCS; he also supplies on-demand technical services to Oahu Resource Conservation and Development. Jacquie's work duties are divided evenly between the Districts and the NRCS.

Thank you to the Hawaii State Department of Health, the City & County of Honolulu, the Oahu RC&D, and the NRCS for supporting the Oahu SWCDs.

## Our Work

The main priority for the Oahu SWCD staff has been to address the backlog of Conservation Plan requests from Oahu farmers. In summer 2006, the list of Conservation Plan requests on Oahu numbered approximately 120 and dated back to 2002. Since then, our staffing has increased and the Districts have been able to focus on fulfilling these requests. Through efforts to organize old files, contact with producers on the list, and coordination with NRCS staff in the Aiea field office, our current list has about 80 requests. We are working

hard to get those Conservation Plans out there!

Response from Cooperators has been great. Every District meeting brings new faces and new opportunities for education and discussion about conservation issues in our area. The Oahu SWCD meetings have not been this well-attended in a long time! The Cooperators that received Conservation Plans this year have been singing the praises of the new SWCD staff.

SWCD staff are also busy preparing

*“Every District meeting brings...new opportunities for education and discussion about conservation issues in our area.”*

water management plans and meter size recommendations for producers seeking agricultural water rates and/or larger water meters from the Board of Water Supply.

## Why Are People Seeking Our Assistance?

Agriculture producers on Oahu are requesting Conservation Plans for a number of reasons: to apply for exemptions from City & County grading and grubbing permits, for lease compliance, and to participate in NRCS programs.

Producers often find other benefits to developing a Conservation Plan: economic gain, social benefits and access to additional technical assistance.

Of course, there are always producers who sign on simply because they are interested in conserving resources on their land and in their community – we love working with these folks! They are often our greatest source of advertising. In fact, we have signed on about 40 new Cooperators this past year, many who have come to us through word-of-mouth from other Cooperators.



*Conservation Plans address concerns that contribute to lost profits and waste of natural resources.*

## Outreach Efforts

Oahu SWCD staff have enjoyed working to increase the profile of the Districts in our community.

We participated in many outreach events over the past year, including:

- Two clean-up events at Kapakahi Stream in Waipahu
- A multi-agency informational session for immigrant farmers and Thai dinner at Fat Law Farm
- 2007 Windward District Science and Engineering Fair judging
- Representing the Oahu SWCDs at the Hawaii Teo Chew Association 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and Annual Spring Banquet
- Ag Awareness Day: Farm to Table, Farm to Market—presented to lawmakers at the State Capitol
- CTAHR's 1st Annual Oahu Agricultural and Environmental Awareness Day—presented educational displays for 550 Oahu 5th grade students
- Ag in the City Day at Honolulu Hale—promoting Oahu agriculture to the office of the Mayor
- Teaching basic soil science to students at Waipahu High School
- Publication and distribution of a brochure, "Windbreak Replacement Options", in cooperation with the NRCS.



*Oahu SWCD Conservation Planner Gill Costa speaking to students about the importance of soil conservation.*

## Water Management Planning

The Oahu SWCDs offer two special options for addressing water concerns: Water Management Plans and Meter Size Recommendations. Water Management Plans consider crop needs, climate conditions and the producer's concerns to make recommendations about irrigation scheduling and system design. The goal of a Water Management Plan is to help producers meet their crop needs without wasting water. Proper water management conserves water, saves money, and reduces erosion and runoff. This type of plan is ideal for Cooperators with a new business or irrigation concerns.

Other Cooperators looking to install larger water meters and/or apply for agricultural water rates from the Honolulu Board of Water Supply can receive Meter Size Recommendations from the Districts. Meter Size Recommendations consider the same variables as a Water Management Plan, but do not make suggestions about scheduling or system design. Rather, the Districts give the Cooperator a letter stating a minimum meter size recommendation based on the Cooperator's operation. This letter from the Districts is needed to apply for a larger meter from the Board of Water Supply.

*"Proper water management conserves water, saves money, and reduces erosion and runoff. "*

## Conserving Resources Economically

Many of our Cooperators come to the Oahu SWCDs with erosion and water concerns that need immediate attention. In some cases, enrolling in NRCS programs is not the way to go. So the question is: How can a Cooperator control water erosion without breaking the bank? With conservation covers and vegetative barriers! In low-hazard or temporary situations, using vegetation can be an economical way to control erosion and water movement. For example, many of our Cooperators are now using vetivergrass (*Vetiveria zizanioides*) as a way of slowing infield erosion and stream sedimentation. Vegetative barriers are much more effective when used with a conservation cover. Cooperators are also using their choice of grasses to control water and soil movement in previously bare areas. Commonly used grass species include: Bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon*), St. Augustinegrass (*Stenotaphrum secundatum*) and oats (*Avena sativa*). Plans with conservation cover and vegetative barrier practices have been successful, and our Cooperators have an economical way to address certain erosion and water control concerns.



*A vegetative barrier and conservation cover used in sensitive areas can reduce*



### West Oahu SWCD Board

- Peter Gibson, Eric Mitchell, Larry Jefts (Chair)
- Missing: Richard McCormack, John McHugh



### Windward Oahu SWCD Board

- Dave Ringuette, Kapua Sproat-Fonoimoana, Rick Towill, Richard Garcia (Chair)
- Missing: Paul Uyehara



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Promoting responsible stewardship  
of natural resources in our  
community

[http://www.hi.nrcs.usda.gov/  
partnerships/oahuswcd/  
index.html](http://www.hi.nrcs.usda.gov/partnerships/oahuswcd/index.html)

## Q & A—Grading, Grubbing, and Stockpiling Permits

### Q: When do I need a grading permit?

A: When your grading exceeds 50 cubic yards of cut or fill, exceeds 3 vertical feet at the deepest point, and/or will alter the drainage pattern of your neighbor's property. Permit fees start at \$45 but can reach over \$1000.

### Q: What is grubbing?

A: Clearing of land that involves digging up and removing plant material, including roots and stems/trunks.

### Q: Do I need a grubbing permit?

A: Yes, if the area to be cleared exceeds 15,000 square feet. Cleared areas must also be sodded or planted immediately. Grubbing fees start at \$90 and increase by area.

### Q: What is stockpiling?

A: Accumulating onsite storage of materials to be used in the future, i.e. topsoil, gravel, or potting material.

### Q: Do I need a stockpiling permit?

A: Yes, if you are storing more than 100 cubic yards of material. Stockpiling permit fees start at \$45.

### Q: How can the Oahu Soil and Water Conservation Districts help me with obtaining a permit exemption?

A: Become a Cooperator with your local SWCD; they will work with you to develop a Conservation Plan for your property. Apply to receive a permit



*Conservation Plans can address resource concerns so that Cooperators can apply for C&C permit exemptions.*

exemption by presenting your completed Conservation Plan to the Honolulu City and County Department of Planning and Permitting. Direct enquiries to the C&C Civil Engineering Branch at 523-4922.