

March 2016 West Oahu News: Sugar Plantation Life, MicroLoans for small farmers, Ag Day at the Capitol, NRCS Training.

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PARTNERSHIPS IN AGRICULTURE

Just a few generations ago, most people were a part of - and had friends or relatives involved with - agriculture. While the relationship has changed a bit, in Hawaii there is growing interest in people reconnecting with the local food and agriculture system.

American farmers are working harder than ever, and it shows. [Today, each American farmer feeds more than 144 people.](#) The need for food produced in the United States is significant. Agriculture is vitally important in sustaining a healthy economy.

It's not just the farmer who makes our food possible. The entire agriculture industry, all the way to the grocery store, are vital links in a chain that brings food to every citizen - and millions of people abroad.

The [Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation](#) will be celebrating National Ag Day at the Capitol on March 18, 2016. It's an especially good time to reflect, learn about and be grateful for agriculture in Hawaii. At Ag Day, meet with and learn from cross-sector partners in Agriculture from across the state. From individuals and organizations in research, development and planning to people who work on seed corn and small organic operations, join us as we come together to celebrate the importance of agriculture in Hawaii.

- Ag Day is nationally hosted by the Agriculture Council of America



Sugar Plantation Life Good To Those Who Really Lived it

-- By Lee Cataluna

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There are times when I hear people talk disparagingly about life on Hawaii's sugar plantations, and I don't recognize anything they're saying. I think that's because they didn't live it.

My father spent his career in sugar. Both my grandfathers worked in sugar. Three of my great-grandfathers worked in sugar. I've lived in plantation houses in Waikapu, Wailuku, Koloa, Olokele and Pahala.

I have never heard a person who actually worked in sugar speak bitterly about paternalism or oppression or terrible working conditions. The only people who rail about how bad sugar workers had it are people who did not grow up in sugar families.

This is what it was like:

A plantation job came with housing. Imagine that! The houses were decent and roomy and, even by today's standards, charming. If a fuse went out in a plantation house, you didn't pick up the yellow pages in the hope of finding an honest electrician. The plantation electrician would come that same day, and it was someone you knew by name. It was the same with plumbing, be it a drippy faucet or a backed-up cesspool. Often, the plumber brought vegetables from his garden or a big bag of mangoes. Sometimes the electrician and the plumber were the same man. The houses had yards where dogs and children could run free. People kept gardens and dried laundry in the sunshine.... [read the full story](#)



Hawaii Future Farmers of America (FFA) Chapters from across the state convened on Oahu March 2-3, 2016 to participate in numerous skills contests.

Hawaii FFA is on the move with membership doubling from 151 in 2014 to over 300 in 2016. The number of active FFA chapters has increased from 10 in 2014 to 15 in 2016.

West Oahu SWCD was invited to judge the FFA Student Agriculture Demonstrations at the FFA at the annual FFA State Convention. Topics included easy

hydroponics; food-safe seed sprout production, active and passive solar water heating systems, and Korean Natural Farming featuring the use of Indigenous Micro-Organisms (IMOs) in a self-cleaning and odorless pig pen.



NRCS Webinars

- March 15th, 2:00pm Eastern: [Identifying Resource Concerns](#): Which Concerns are Really Legitimate? – Participants will understand the criteria that USDA NRCS uses to evaluate natural resource conditions in the field and document the resource concerns for conservation planning purposes.
- March 23th, 2:00pm Eastern: [Landscapes for Butterfly Conservation](#) – Participants will learn best management practices for butterflies at site and landscape scales.
- March 30, 2:00pm Eastern: [Conservation Planning Considerations for Outdoor Swine Operations](#). Participants will have a better understanding of the unique difficulties presented and the opportunities provided to solve resource concerns on outdoor swine operations.

FUNDING UPDATE:

USDA Expands Microloan Program To Help Farmers Purchase Farmland and Improve Property

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has begun offering farm ownership microloans, creating a new financing avenue for farmers to buy and improve property. These microloans will be especially helpful for [new and beginning farmers and ranchers](#) looking for assistance to get started, U.S. veterans looking for a career

in farming, and those who have small and mid-sized farming operations.

The microloan program, which celebrates its third anniversary this year, has been hugely successful, providing more than 16,800 low-interest loans, totaling over \$373 million to producers across the country. Microloans have helped farmers and ranchers with operating costs, such as feed, fertilizer, tools, fencing, equipment, and living expenses since 2013. Seventy percent of loans have gone to new farmers.

This year, microloans will be available to also help with farm land and building purchases, and soil and water conservation improvements. FSA designed the expanded program to simplify the application process, expand eligibility requirements and expedite smaller real estate loans to help farmers strengthen their operations.

To learn more about the FSA microloan program [visit the website](#), or contact your local FSA office. Find your nearest office location [here](#)

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Two bills that directly affect the SWCD's are House Bill [2420](#): Making an Appropriation to the Hawaii Association of Conservation Districts and sister Senate Bill, [2990](#).

HB2420 passed the second reading with amendments on February 16. SB2990 passed second reading with amendments on February 12.

To check the status of bills and/or to submit testimony, please visit <http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov/>

West Oahu SWCD Directors

Larry Jefts (Chair), Peter Gibson, Alan Gottlieb, Taylor Kellerman, & John McHugh.

February West Oahu SWCD meeting: Tuesday March 23, at 12:30. Location: Crop

Protection Services Conference Room located in the Upper Kunia HARC building.
Learn more at <http://www.oahuswcd.org>.

The West Oahu Soil and Water Conservation District is committed to building partnerships that strengthen agriculture in Hawaii and contribute to a vibrant island community, environment, and economy.



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