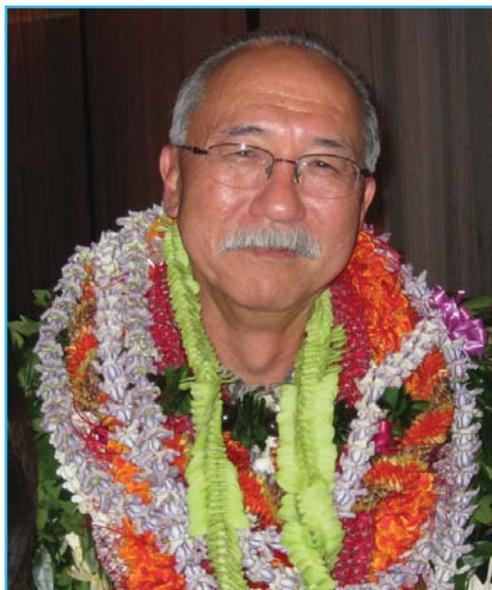


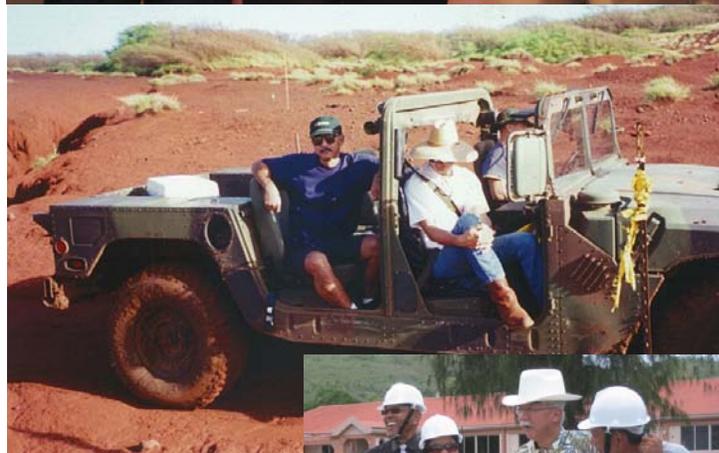
Director Retires From PIA



Yes, the rumors are true—Director Lawrence T. Yamamoto is retiring July 1st after serving 34 years with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). A strong supporter of locally grown agricultural products and caring for our islands resources, Larry will truly be missed.

A graduate of the University of Hawaii, he began his career when NRCS used to be the Soil Conservation Service. Previous NRCS positions held include Soil Conservationist, District Conservationist, State Resource Conservationist, and Assistant State Conservationist for Operations. As a result of his experience and working on different islands, Larry was recognized for countless accolades, including “Manager of Year” by the Federal Executive Board and the “Presidential Award” by the Federal Asian Pacific American Council.

Following the retirement of Lawrence T. Yamamoto, the NRCS Chief announced that Angel Figueroa is the newly selected incoming Director of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service for the Pacific Islands Area. Mr. Figueroa will take the reins as Director in August.



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Lawrence T. Yamamoto, PIA Director

Message from the PIA Director

It is with mixed feelings that I send you my final message as the Director of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. As some of you already know, I am retiring from federal service on July 1st. I feel blessed that I was able to serve with true conservation professionals like you and NRCS during a period of time when funding for conservation programs grew to an all time high. This was not always the case.

When I began my career as a soil conservationist working with the USDA Soil Conservation Service, we delivered our services with limited recognition of the value of our services and only minimal financial incentives. Also at that time, the best lands of Hawaii were being used to produce mostly sugarcane and pineapples. Sweet Kula onions were a secret reserved for those who lived on Maui. Pineapples mostly came out of cans. And the only coffee grown in Hawaii came from the Kona area.

Now, with the closing of the sugarcane and pineapple plantations, much more land is available for agriculture. Organic farming and grass fed beef is growing in popularity. The coffee industry is growing everywhere. Pacific regional cuisine has lead to an increased interest in locally produced foods. Agriculture is much more diverse and vibrant.

While this was happening the Soil Conservation Service became the Natural Resources Conservation Service. With this name change came a dramatic change in available programs. Now the financial assistance programs we support are numerous and well funded. We are able to deliver more financial assistance than ever before. The demand for our services is also greater than ever before. Our services and expertise has been recognized in many places and by many people.

Working all these years for the NRCS has been a dream come true for me. My career in natural resource conservation has provided me a wondrous opportunity to work with many amazing people in some of the most breathtakingly beautiful areas of the world. But you, as conservation professionals, know that the beautiful places we live in need the help of dedicated people to stay beautiful and productive.

With that in mind I want to lay out a challenge to all of you. While I am leaving the profession, the work of protecting our islands and conserving our natural resources is not done. In fact, this valuable work is needed more than ever. As the pressures to develop the bounty of these islands grow, so does the responsibility of conservation professionals grow. It is a fact that you are needed to champion the wise and sustainable use of our island's natural resources. So with that, I pass this torch of conservation on to you. Our natural resources are counting on you and there is much left to be done.

Lawrence T. Yamamoto, Director

Current Developments is a newsletter for employees and partners. You may submit articles and photos to:

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U.S. Department of Agriculture
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Volunteers Serve Up

*by Pamela Aguon, Saipan Soil Conservationist;
Submitted by Antonette Tornito,
Volunteer Coordinator in Guam for West Area*

Earth Team volunteers staffed an outreach event in February at the Hot Pepper Festival on the Island of Tinian, of the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands (CNMI). They helped promote conservation education and walked away with a cooking contest win.

The CNMI is in a political union with the United States and consists of 15 islands about three-quarters of the way from Hawaii to the Philippines. It is served by the NRCS office in Mongmong, Guam.

The festival was created to celebrate the island's main crop, the hot pepper locally known as Donne'/Donni Sâli. The festival's activities included educational booths, dance, volleyball and boat race competitions; cultural performances, a cooking contest and a hot pepper eating contest.

NRCS outreach activities were held in the main pavilion during the two day event. Conservation staffers were assisted by three Earth Team Volunteers: William A. Aguon, Vincent J. Reyes, and Sheryl Y.M. Sablan. The Earth Team volunteers set up an NRCS display and helped staff explain to participants the importance of conservation planning and the benefits of installing conservation practices.

They also won first prize! Earth Team volunteers Aguon and Reyes took an hour off and teamed up to walk away with top honors in the festival's cooking contest. Their work was judged best in taste and presentation. They used a recipe which featured hot peppers and was served in cut, mature coconut shells.



The Winning Dish

Earth Day in PIA

Thanks to the 87 valuable individuals that volunteered a total of 4,441 hours in the PIA!



Earth Day in Hilo



Earth Day in Hoolehua



Earth Day in Honolulu

Employee Spotlight



Jessica Newpher, District Conservationist and Larry Yamamoto, Director of the PIA.

My career with NRCS began several years ago in Nevada with the student career intern program. Nevada's State Program Manager recruited me while I was employed with the Lahontan Valley Conservation District located in a small farming community in central Nevada. My SCEP experience allowed me to focus my college courses and earn a degree in conservation biology from the University of Nevada, Reno. I was fortunate to be placed in a field office in Nevada following my graduation and remained in that state working in several different field offices as a soil conservationist and acting area biologist for six years. Today I have the good fortune to be the district conservationist for the Hilo Field Office where exemplary work is completed daily on cropland, pastureland and forestland. Our team puts conservation on the ground using such programs as EQIP, CSP, CREP and CTA in conjunction with our four sister soil and water conservation districts.

I am happily married with two children. My son and daughter keep us very active with Junior Varsity softball, High School acting class and Judo. During our down time we enjoy a sunny day at the beach, fishing and playing with our first poi dog that we rescued from the local animal shelter. Working with the Pacific Islands Area staff has been a gift from God that I am so grateful for each day.

Deputy Secretary Visits



Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan is pictured here with Kiewit Project manager Jeff Fahey and other community leaders on a visit to the Lahaina Watershed project site.

During her visit to Lahaina, Hawaii Merrigan met with local officials and community members. The discussions centered on the history of the Lahaina Watershed Project (LWP) and the multiple benefits that programs such as the LWP provide. Community members thanked the Deputy Secretary for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service programs provided to rural communities, expressed their appreciation for these projects, and discussed the overall benefits for citizens of Hawaii and the nation.



People's Garden in Hoolehua

NOTICE TO HISPANIC AND/OR WOMEN FARMERS AND RANCHERS

COMPENSATION FOR CLAIMS OF DISCRIMINATION

If you believe that the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) improperly denied farm loan benefits to you between 1981 and 2000 because you are Hispanic or because you are female, you may be eligible to apply for compensation. This means you may be eligible if:

- 1.** You sought a farm loan or farm-loan servicing during that period;
- 2.** The loan was denied, provided late, approved for a lesser amount than requested, approved with restrictive conditions, or USDA failed to provide an appropriate loan service; and
- 3.** You believe these actions were based on your being Hispanic or your being female.

In 2011, a claims administrator will begin mailing claims packages to those who have requested one through the Call Center or website. The claims package will have detailed information about the eligibility and claims process.

If you want to register your name to receive a claims package, access the Hispanic and Women Farmer and Rancher Call Center or website:

Call Center: 1-888-508-4429

Website: www.farmerclaims.gov

For guidance, you may contact a lawyer or other legal services provider in your community. **USDA cannot provide legal advice to you.**

If you are currently represented by counsel regarding allegations of discrimination or in a lawsuit claiming discrimination, you should contact your counsel regarding this claims process.

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June 2011



Personnel Update



(L-R) John Womack, District Conservationist; Larry Yamamoto, Director; and Drew Stout, Civil Engineer.

55th Annual Excellence in Federal Government

Each year, the Federal Executive Board recognizes employees for going above and beyond. This year we are proud to honor two employees in the Pacific Islands Area for their Excellence in Federal Government. Congratulations to *John Womack* from American Samoa, who was selected our Federal Supervisor of the Year and to *Drew Stout* from Waimea, who was selected for Federal Employee of the Year. Well done gentlemen!

Length of Service – 5 years: Andres Juario (2010), Kara Nelson (2010), Daniel Cahill (2011), Bernard Matatumua-Vermeulen (2011), Alvaro Pecson (2011)

Length of Service – 10 years: Mark Defley (2009), Patrick Niemeyer (2009), Stephen Case (2011), Greg Koob (2011), Kahana Stone (2011), Bobby Vandivort (2011), Carolyn Wong (2011)

Length of Service – 20 years: Timothy Brasuell (2009), Robert Gavenda (2010), Cynthia Shishido (2010), Joe Takai (2010), Martin Naputi (2011)

Length of Service – 25 years: Kurencio Ngowakl (2009), Tony Ingersoll (2010), Shirley Nakamura (2010)

Length of Service – 30 years: George “Tony” Rolfes (2009), Lex Riggle (2010), Gail Ichikawa (2010), Glenn Sakamoto (2010), Susan Kubo (2011)

Length of Service – 35 years: Michael Hayama (2010)

Incoming:

Lehua Angay, Program Assistant, Hilo
Mila Apisa, Soil Conservation Technician, Am. Samoa
Dan Cahill, Soil Conservationist, Lihue
Matthew Chong, Student Trainee, Aiea
Michael Constantinides, Forest Ecologist, State Office
William Fitzgerald, Soil Conservationist, Kahului
Nicholas Gallo, Soil Conservationist, Kealakekua
Nicola Giardina, Resource Conservationist, State Office
Amy Gilliam, Student Trainee, Kealakekua
Jeffrey Harlow, Asst. Director for Programs, State Office
Laila Jayyousi, Soil Conservationist, Waimea
Paul Lake, Resource Conservationist, Pohnpei
Cheryl Lambert, District Conservationist, Aiea
Bernard Matatumua-Vermeulen, Soil Conservationist, Kealakekua

Kara Nelson, Resource Conservationist, State Office
Bobette Parsons, Soil Conservationist, Hilo
Makalani Pina, Student Trainee, Hilo
Adam Reed, Water Quality Specialist, State Office
Jan Michael Reyes, Student Trainee, Guam
Tony Rolfes, State Soil Scientist, State Office
Tracy Sakato, Human Resources Specialist, State Office
Nicholas Saumweber, Soil Conservationist, Am. Samoa
Jessica Sternfels, District Conservationist, Kealakekua
Cynthia Stiles, Soil Scientist, State Office
James Sutter, Soil Conservationist, Kealakekua
Benjamin Vinhateiro, Soil Conservationist, Aiea
Ryan Woolbright, Civil Engineer, Kahului

Outgoing:

Elskin Allen, resigned
Richard Berscheid, transfer to Park Rapids, MN
Dan Bloedel, transfer to New Mexico
Phillip Cherry, transfer to NHQ
David Clausnitzer, transfer to Massachusetts
Rhonda Draper, transfer to DoD
Bill Hollingsworth, transfer to Army Corps of Engineers
Chad Kacir, transfer to Oklahoma
Dennis Kimberlin, transfer to Oregon
Jeffrey Pantaleo, transfer to DON
Brian Peck, transfer to Forest Service
Mike Robotham, transfer to Lincoln, NE
Craig Smith, transfer to Alaska
Tony Sunseri, transfer to Grass Valley, CA
Sarah Tanuvasa, transfer to Oregon
Mike Whitt, transfer to NHQ
Larry Yamamoto, retirement

*99% of failures come from people
who have the habit of making excuses.
~George W. Carver*

Participant Completes 2nd EQIP Contract

by Pam Sablan-Aguon, Soil Conservationist in Saipan

William Ada completed his second EQIP Contract with the NRCS Saipan Field Office. The suite of practices prescribed to the land under this contract to address various resource concerns included: Contour Orchard and Other Fruit Area; Vegetative Barrier; Nutrient Management; Pest Management; and Roof Runoff Structure. Mr. Ada's first successful contract consisted of: Conservation Crop Rotation; Residue Management Strip-till/No-till/Direct-seed; Field Border; Contour Farming; Micro-Irrigation System; Irrigation Water Conveyance Pipe; Irrigation Water Management; Nutrient Management; and Pest Management.

In 2006, Mr. Ada signed up for EQIP for his Orchard Operation on his private land. Since his approval for EQIP funding, Mr. Ada has worked with NRCS on initiating the contour layout for implementation of the planned vegetative barrier. Upon establishment of the vegetative barrier, concentrated water flows have been reduced and soil saved. Over 1800 feet of vegetative barrier, using vetiver grass (Georgia Sunshine #5499), was installed on the contour. The barrier installed served as a guide for his contour orchard implementation. His contour orchard consisted of various tropical fruit trees. Mr. Ada's primary goal for his operation is to revive fruit trees that are rarely found in current orchard operations but were once commonly found throughout CNMI. Having his orchard on the contour increased water infiltration, reduced concentrated water flow and allowed a more efficient operation of equipment.

The planned nutrient and pest management practices were implemented to improve plant health, vigor and productivity, with pest management aiding in the reduction of pest damages. Nutrient and Pest Management have been applied for a number of years and Mr. Ada continues to follow NRCS recommendations to mitigate potential impacts of nutrients and pesticides. For every year, he has managed to decrease harmful levels of chemical application and has geared to safer levels of fertilizer and pesticide applications. Now, all his fruit trees are thriving and producing more quality fruits at harvest. He has also installed a Roof Runoff Structure which allows him to collect runoff from his roof and store it in a tank for supplemental irrigation. The roof runoff structure also protects the ground surrounding his headquarters and the adjacent road from eroding. Upon successful completion of this contract, Mr. Ada continues to share his experiences with NRCS and its program to other agriculture producers.



(L-R) William Ada, Larry Yamamoto, and James Eller stand in front of an established vegetative barrier.

Currently, Mr. Ada is moving forward toward completing his third contract, which consists of a whole suite of conservation practices to address various resource concerns on his cropland/orchard operation. Conservation practices prescribed in this third contract are similar to the first contract with the exception of alley cropping, mulching, contour orchard, vegetative barrier, diversion, and an irrigation regulating reservoir.



William Ada, EQIP participant in Saipan.

Converting to Sustainable Ag



Anthony Cruz in Dededo, Guam.

by Joe Tuquero, Soil Conservationist in Guam

Anthony Cruz, a small scale farmer in northern Guam, farms approximately two acres with common truck crops like tomato, beans, peppers, and papaya. As a young Chamorro (native of the Mariana Islands), he grew up cultivating traditional crops including taro, yams, and cassava, which he still produces today. Prior to NRCS technical assistance, Mr. Cruz's farm operation consisted of conventional-type practices where he cultivated his fields by fully tilling, over-fertilization of crops, and erratic application. In 2006, Mr. Cruz and NRCS began their partnership. Through field data collection, NRCS identified several resource concerns such as erosion, plant productivity, potential chemical drift, invasive species, and more. NRCS introduced several conservation practices that would address the resource concerns. Mr. Cruz agreed to try some of the conservation practices that were relatively new concepts to him. Some of these practices include windbreak establishment, pest and nutrient management, residue management, cover crop, mulching and conservation crop rotation. Mr. Cruz now realizes the environmental and farm benefits of the conservation practices he has been implementing. Today Mr. Cruz has fully converted his farm operation to a sustainable agriculture system. As NRCS cooperator since 2006, he continues to work with NRCS to improve his operation, and now has engaged in two EQIP contracts.

Mulching provides numerous benefits including erosion control, weed suppression, organic matter inputs, and more. In this particular farm site, mulching has been very effective in conserving moisture. Mr. Cruz once only thought that mulching will help suppress weeds, but now he is firm believer in how mulch reduces soil moisture loss and enhances the quality of his soil. He uses only organic material for mulch including wood chips and grass clippings.



Residue management and No Till/Strip Till



Congratulations to Bernard Watson of Guam (pictured in the center) for being recognized as Farmer/Rancher of the Year! Thank you for being a role model to farmers for No Till and protecting our endangered species!

Another Listed Plant for Hawaii

by Gregory A. Koob, PIA State Biologist, Honolulu, HI

A rare Molokai plant, known only by its scientific name *Phyllostegia hispida*, was designated an endangered species March 17, 2009, by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. *Phyllostegia hispida* is found only in the wet forests of eastern Molokai. *Phyllostegia hispida* is a nonaromatic member of the mint family (Lamiaceae). It is a loosely spreading, many-branched vine that forms large tangled masses, and is known only from the wet forests of eastern Molokai at elevations between 2,300 and 4,200 feet.



Phyllostegia hispida growing by the boardwalk in Kamakou Preserve, Molokai.

Phyllostegia hispida has rarely been seen in the wild. From 1910 to 1996, a total of 10 individuals were recorded, but in subsequent years died for various reasons. Since 1997, surveys failed to locate additional individuals and the species was thought to be extirpated (no longer in the wild) until 2005 when two seedlings were discovered at The Nature Conservancy's Kamakou Preserve.

Before those plants were rediscovered, I had the privilege of propagating this species using micropropagation techniques while working at the Lyon Arboretum in the 1990s. Small cuttings were taken from the last known plant before it died. We successfully propagated it in the lab and gave some plants to the Nature Conservancy who planted them by their boardwalk in the Kamakou Preserve (see photo). Luckily, I was allowed to visit those plants after they got established and before the new plants were discovered.

Since 2007, 24 wild plants have been discovered (23 in the Kamakou Preserve, 1 in the State's Puu Alii Natural Area Reserve), and more than one hundred individuals produced from cuttings have been outplanted in the Kamakou Preserve. A total of 238 plants are known to exist today.

The most significant threat is the species' low numbers, which make it particularly susceptible to extinction from random events such as hurricanes and disease outbreaks. Other major threats are predation and habitat degradation by feral pigs and competition with invasive, non-native plants.

Phyllostegia hispida has been a candidate for listing under the ESA since 1997. The species was officially proposed for listing as endangered on February 19, 2008. Federal listing of *Phyllostegia hispida* automatically invokes state listing under Hawaii's endangered species law.

Conservation measures have been taken and continue today to protect the species. A variety of organizations such as the University of Hawaii's Lyon Arboretum on Oahu, the National Tropical Botanical Garden on Kauai, and Kalaupapa National Historical Park on Molokai are propagating plants that may be used for outplanting into suitable habitat. Land managers from Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources have fenced some plants to protect them from feral ungulates, and The Nature Conservancy continues to control feral pigs and alien plants within the Kamakou Preserve.

Critical habitat is not being proposed at this time, because the Service is unable to identify the physical and biological features essential to the conservation of *Phyllostegia hispida* and is therefore unable to identify areas that contain these features. Under the Endangered Species Act, the Service has one year after a species is listed to designate critical habitat.

Photo Contest Winners

Congratulations to Bob Joy, Stephen Skipper, and Jessica Ludgate for being this round of photo contest winners! For the Conservation category, we had seven nominations. For the Cultural category, we had four nominations, and for the Scenic category, we had five nominations. The Leadership Team judged the photos on Appropriateness to Category, Composition, Creativity, and Aesthetics.

The winner for the Conservation category is *Bob Joy*, Plant Materials Specialist in Hoolehua. His picture is of a carpenter bee on a 'Tropic Sun' Sunn Hemp flower.

The winner for the Scenic category is *Stephen Skipper*, Coordinator in Hilo. His picture is of eucalyptus deglupta.

The winner for the Cultural category is *Jessica Ludgate*, Soil Conservationist in Hoolehua. Her picture is of kupuna of the ocean.

To view all the photos that were submitted for the contest, see www.pia.nrcs.usda.gov/features/photo_contest_photogallery.asp. Thank you to everyone who contributed photos, to the judges, and to *Karl Mikasa* for creating the searchable database of images.

If you are interested in participating in the next contest, please email one JPEG or TIFF per category to jolene.lau@hi.usda.gov. The deadline to submit photos for the next issue of *Current Developments* is due on August 31, 2011.

September is
Hispanic
Heritage Month



Conservation category: Bob Joy's carpenter bee.



Scenic category: Steve Skipper's eucalyptus deglupta.



Cultural category: Jessica Ludgate's kupuna of the ocean.