



Agribusiness Development Corporation

Ag Notes

MAY 2020 NEWSLETTER

Farmers Cope With Their Latest Challenge: COVID-19

At a 1,200-acre parcel just north of Wahiawa, farmer Shin Ho gives a tour showing the recent fruits of her labor.

“We raise about 100,000 pounds of produce each month for local markets,” said Ho, picking some ripe eggplants while inspecting her crops in the field.

Ho, general manager of Ho Farms Hawaii, leases about 70 acres of farmland from the state Agribusiness Development Corp. (ADC) to raise eggplant, cherry tomatoes, Japanese cucumbers, and long beans.

Since 1994, ADC has remained committed to protecting the future of agriculture in Hawaii by facilitating the industry’s transformation from a dual-crop economy of sugar and pineapple to diversified agriculture. Two years ago, the Ho family decided to lease farmland at the former Galbraith Estate property now under ADC jurisdiction.

Ho said ADC’s Galbraith parcel is in a centralized area suitable for her family’s farming business. There is enough space to keep all of their farming equipment in one location to help keep their operating costs down. Her company also recently invested in constructing a giant shade house – a larger open-air version of a greenhouse – to help protect their crops.

“A greenhouse would be more of an enclosed structure that retains heat,” Ho said while showing the new facility under construction. “A shade house keeps out the heat, but provides more ventilation.”

The family company has previously faced numerous challenges by Mother Nature – drought, flooding and pests –

that can physically harm or damage their crops. But never have they dealt with a situation like the Coronavirus pandemic, which has greatly disrupted the global and state’s food supply chain.

The recent COVID-19 situation has led to many challenges for local farmers, as restaurants that depended on their produce have either closed or drastically reduced their services in response to new social distancing measures.

Because of the pandemic, the drop in demand for food was so sudden that no one really had time to prepare or react, Ho said.

ADC executive director James Nakatani said the agricultural industry is looking at ways to keep farmers operating in the short-term, and at how their marketplace will change in the long-term.

“Like a lot of industries here, the ag community is going to have to re-think how we do business,” he said. “At the same time, this may cause more people to realize why Hawaii needs to invest more in food sustainability and diversified ag, since it has affected our food supply chain, and still does.”

Ho agrees that farmers are going to have to be more creative and think outside the box.

“Because the restaurant business has shut down, we’ve had to be creative in finding new venues to sell our product like the Hawaii Farm Bureau’s ‘Farm-To-Car’ service, other online food services, and farmers’ markets,” Ho said. “Some of the local grocery chains have also been taking in more of our product.”



Ho Farms Hawaii General Manager Shin Ho provides a field tour, showing her latest harvest of eggplants and cherry tomatoes.



Farmer Shin Ho shows a giant shade house that her family is installing to help protect their crops.

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Ho's father got into the farming business in 1991. Despite the latest challenges, Shin Ho remains undeterred in continuing her family's legacy in diversified ag.

"It's also about diversifying our local economy; raising more food locally and keeping this in open, green space," she said. "Hard work? Definitely. But to me, the end product – along with how it benefits customers and the economy – is what makes this job satisfying."

To learn more about ADC and our work in the community, go to our website at www.hdoa.hawaii.gov/adc.



About the COVID-19 Emergency Farmer Relief Program

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, local farmers are experiencing hardship. In order to provide much-needed support to Hawaii's farmers, the Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDOA) has developed a COVID-19 Emergency Farmer Relief Program, with the first round of checks distributed on April 22.

Drawing from \$250,000 in funding made possible through Governor Ige's March 4 emergency proclamation, the program supports farmers who have been hard hit by the current economic situation. Of the 333 individuals and associations that applied, 106 proposals were selected to receive amounts ranging from \$2,000 for individual farmers and ranchers to \$10,000 for nonprofits and agricultural associations that have been financially devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to the diligent work of HDOA, the majority of farmers and agricultural operations received their relief funds within just three weeks of applying.

For farmers who are still looking for financial support, HDOA's Agricultural



Loan Division has also launched its Emergency Agricultural Loan Program, providing low-interest emergency loans and micro loans to eligible farmers. To take advantage of this program and apply for financial assistance, contact your HDOA office:

Oahu, Kauai, and Maui:

(808) 973-9460

Hilo: (808) 933-9977

Kona: (808) 323-7591

ADC Updates: Improvements at Whitmore Property

Security improvements continue to be implemented at ADC's 230-acre parcel Whitmore property following complaints by adjacent neighbors regarding on-site criminal activity. ADC is ramping up its efforts immediately to secure and prepare the currently vacant lands for agricultural production.

The agency has hired around-the-clock security and begun clearing brush and trash at the site. In addition, a towing company was recently contracted to

soon haul away abandoned vehicles left on the property.

ADC anticipates the land will be ready for farming by Summer 2020. We ask for the community's patience as changes continue to be made to make the area safer.

New Visitor Policy for ADC Satellite Office

Because of new health and safety

measures related to the COVID-19 situation, ADC has adjusted operations at its new Satellite Office at Whitmore, Oahu. Effective immediately, an appointment needs to be scheduled before visiting the Wahiawa office at 1116 Whitmore Avenue. You can make an appointment to meet with ADC Property Manager Lyle Roe by contacting him at (808) 622-6696 or lyle.t.roe@hawaii.gov. Thank you for your understanding with the ongoing situation.

