



Agribusiness Development Corporation

AG NOTES

June 2023 Newsletter



ADC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JAMES "JIMMY" NAKATANI (1949-2023)

On April 23, longtime State Agribusiness Development Corporation executive director **James "Jimmy" Nakatani** passed away unexpectedly at the age of 74. The sudden loss

of Nakatani – head of ADC since 2012 – leaves a huge void at both within our state agency and the local agriculture industry.

Following Nakatani's death, the ADC board of directors appointed Mark Takemoto as acting ADC executive director until a new permanent director is selected.

With ADC tasked with converting plantation land previously used for sugar and pineapple production to diversified ag use, Nakatani was instrumental in seeking state funding to acquire land and key pieces of water infrastructure throughout O'ahu and Kaua'i. Overall, Nakatani helped the organization acquire about 23,000 acres of agricultural land previously used by the large companies like Dole Foods and other major ag companies.

"Local agriculture was not only Jimmy's career, it was something that was with him through his whole life," said outgoing ADC board of directors chairperson Fred Lau. "It was something that was in his blood. His background and experience on the matter proved invaluable to ADC and the local ag industry as a whole."

Nakatani's involvement in agriculture began with his family watercress farm business, Nakatani Farms, Inc., for which he was the owner and Chief Executive

Officer from 1978 to 1994. A graduate of Waipahu High School and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, he later became the President of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau and served as director of the state Department of Agriculture from 1995 to 2003.

As head of ADC, Nakatani spearheaded long-term ag projects that were finally coming to fruition at his death.

On Kaua'i, ADC under Nakatani partnered with the Kekaha Agriculture Association to create economic opportunities for local small farmers to thrive and grow produce meant for the local and overseas markets. Both organizations also worked together to make the former plantation irrigation ditch operable and available for future ag use, as well as improve other needed infrastructure in the Kaua'i area.



Nakatani inspects a shade house on ADC land outside Wahiawā with Ho Farms general manager Shin Ho back in 2020.

One of Nakatani's final accomplishments for the organization was helping coordinate the selection of farming tenants for the remaining vacant 1,200 acres of ADC property in Central O'ahu just outside Wahiawā. Some of the ag tenants have already begun moving

(continued from page one)

in to set up their operations, with the other chosen farmers close to completing their soil conservation plans as part of their license agreements to farm on ADC property.

Along with helping to acquire and convert needed land for diversified ag, Nakatani was instrumental in exploring soil and irrigation techniques that would benefit local farmers. This included travels to other countries where farming climate and soil conditions were similar to Hawai'i.

"Jimmy wasn't the type of person who liked to take credit for things, he made a lot of efforts behind the scenes to aid farmers in various ways. All that mattered to him was that things got done" said ADC director Takemoto. "He took a lot of criticism for some of his administrative decisions, but like a boxer he took the punishment and kept moving forward. That's how I like to always remember him is for his strive and perseverance."

In a [recent Civil Beat story](#) following Nakatani's passing, Hawai'i Farm Bureau executive director Brian Miyamoto was asked about Nakatani's footprint with ADC and the agricultural sector in general.

"I don't think his legacy is done," Miyamoto said. "I think his legacy is agriculture itself."

Funeral services for Nakatani are pending.

THREE NEW MEMBERS APPOINTED TO ADC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Board of Directors for the State Agribusiness Development Corporation recently added three new members.

Appointed by the governor, Jason Okuhama, Karen Seddon and Jayson Watts were confirmed by the State Senate this past legislative session. They will serve on the 10-member ADC board along with current members: board chair Warren Watanabe, Glenn Hong, Lyle Tabata, State Department of Agriculture Chair Sharon Hurd, State Commission on Water Resource Management Deputy Director

Kaleo Manuel, and State Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism Deputy Director Dane Wicker.



JASON OKUHAMA

Mr. Okuhama is the Managing Partner of Commercial and Business Lending, specializing in USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Rural Development, and U.S. Small Business Administration loan programs, as well as commercial real estate and residential financing. His term on the board runs until June 30, 2027.



KAREN SEDDON

Ms. Seddon currently sits as the Regional Vice President of Hawai'i at EAH Housing. She has decades of real estate and affordable housing experience and has previously served as the Executive Director of the Hawai'i Housing and Finance Development Corporation (HHFDC). Her term on the board will run until June 30, 2027.



JAYSON WATTS

Mr. Watts currently sits on boards of the Maui County Farm Bureau and the Hawai'i Food Industry Association and serves as Director of External Affairs and Strategic Initiatives at Mahi Pono, LLC. Before joining Mahi Pono, Watts served many years in various government and agricultural policy roles as special assistant to the Director of the Hawai'i Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, senior advisor to two Hawai'i Lieutenant Governors, and the Assistant Sergeant at Arms of the Hawai'i State Senate. His term runs until June 30, 2025.

"We are grateful to have these three with their extensive background and expertise join our board of directors," said ADC acting executive director Mark Takemoto. "Their experience and input will be instrumental in helping keep ADC and Hawai'i's agriculture industry moving forward."

The ADC board of directors meets monthly during the third Thursday of each month.