



STATE OF HAWAII
AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 6, 2024

The State of Hawai'i Agribusiness Development Corporation Ushers in New Leadership and Era of Progress

HONOLULU — The Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC) is proud to announce the onboarding of new leadership as of July 1, marking a transformative period for the agency. Thirty years since its inception in 1994, ADC is living up to its mission of dynamic leadership and aggressive thinking with the introduction of Chairperson Lyle Tabata, Vice Chairperson Jason Okuhama, new Board Member Jesse Cooke and new Interim Board Members Nathan Trump and Dean Okimoto, and Executive Director Wendy Gady, who are set to drive the agency toward unprecedented agricultural success. ADC thanks outgoing Chair Warren Watanabe, who served ADC's board over the last year.

"We are pleased to welcome our new ADC leadership," says Wendy Gady, ADC executive director. "I am confident that under the direction of Chair Tabata, Vice Chair Okuhama and the entire ADC board of directors, we can lead our organization to a new chapter of success in agribusiness across Hawai'i to meet our farming, land use, and food production goals throughout the islands."

ADC was created to facilitate the transition from a dual crop economy of sugar and pineapple to a diverse, multi-crop industry. The agency is responsible for transitioning former plantation lands and water systems to diversified long-term agricultural use, developing diversified agriculture facilities, and finding innovative solutions for the contemporary challenges faced by the agricultural industry. Under the leadership of its new team, ADC is better equipped than ever to fulfill this mission.

Meet the New Leadership

New ADC Chairperson, Lyle Tabata (County of Kaua'i board representative)

Mr. Lyle Tabata is currently employed by the Hawai'i Department of Transportation Highways KWHY-K as a maintenance engineer. He has worked at QRSE, LLC and is an RME with B&T Contractors. He was assigned to Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transit (HART) East Construction Engineering and Inspection (CE&I), City Center Utility Relocation (CCUR) as Deputy Resident Engineer CE&I CCUR, on O'ahu for little over a year.

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Tabata is a seasoned manager and field engineer with 10 years as the appointed Deputy and Acting County Engineer of Public Works for the County of Kaua'i. For 23 years, he worked in the Hawai'i sugar industry to become Vice President of Amfac Sugar Kaua'i, manager of Lihue Plantation Company, Ltd., Kekaha Sugar Co., and Kaua'i Sugar Storage Company, Ltd., in charge of operations, maintenance, engineering, safety, environmental compliance, and personnel.

Tabata is a graduate of Waipahu High School and received his BS in mechanical engineering technology from Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois, and MBA from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. He has served on the Hawai'i Pacific Health board, the Kaua'i Department of Water board, King Kaumuali'i Elementary School Community Council, the Kaua'i Economic Development Board, the Mayor's Solid Waste Task Force, and presently serves on the Agribusiness Development Corporation board, the Wilcox Hospital board, Get Fit Kaua'i Built Environment & Safe Routes to School Task Force, and the Aloha Council Boy Scouts of America board and as a scoutmaster of Troop 148 on Kaua'i.

New Vice Chairperson Jason Okuhama

Mr. Okuhama is the Managing Partner of Commercial and Business Lending, a commercial loan broker company established in 2000. The company specializes in USDA Farm Service Agency, USDA Rural Development, and U.S. Small Business Administration loan programs, and commercial real estate financing. The regions that Mr. Okuhama covers include Hawaii, South and Western Pacific, and the continental US, and he possesses 43 years of banking and commercial lending experience. Prior to establishing his company, he was Vice President with Bank of America and was responsible for the Bank's government assisted business lending programs in Hawaii and Pacific Territories.

Before joining Bank of America, Mr. Okuhama served as Business Loan Officer with DBEDT's Business Service's Division and worked for First Hawaiian Bank, Hawaii National Bank and International Savings. Over the years, Mr. Okuhama has volunteered his time and is currently the Board President of the non-profit Hawaii Alliance for Community-Based, Economic Development. And he was previously a Board of Director on the Hawaii Community Development Authority; Board of Director on the Aloha Tower Development Corporation; Board President of his Residential Condo Association, and Treasurer of his Commercial Condo Association.

New ADC Board Member Jesse Cooke (City and County of Honolulu board representative)

Jesse Cooke, a St. Louis School graduate with a bachelor's degree in economics from Emory University and an MBA from Georgia State University, brings a wealth of financial and strategic expertise to ADC. His career includes roles at Hawaiian Airlines, The Walt Disney Company, Harren Equity Partners, and the Wachovia Leveraged Finance Group. As a CFA® charter holder, Jesse combines his analytical skills with a deep commitment to community and agricultural partnerships. His work at Ulupono Initiative involves cultivating relationships with farmers and ranchers, ensuring that support provided is impactful and sustainable. Appointed as the Honolulu representative on May 1, Jesse offers crucial guidance on agricultural strategy and local food production sustainability.

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New Interim ADC Board Member, Nathan Trump (Hawaii County)

Nathan Trump is the General Manager of Island Harvest, a family-operated organic farm in Kohala on Hawai'i Island and graduated from Kohala High School. He oversees the cultivation of 500 acres of organic certified macadamia nuts and the production of a retail line of packaged macadamia nut products. In addition to macadamia nuts, the farm has recently established small orchards of limes and breadfruit. Prior to returning to Hawai'i to operate the family farm, Nathan began his career in agriculture as a Management Associate with Cargill Animal Nutrition in Kansas City, KS after graduating from Wheaton College (Il.) in 2014 with a degree in International Relations. Nathan is a dedicated leader in Hawaii's agricultural community, serving as President of the Hawai'i Macadamia Nut Association and on the board of the Synergistic Hawai'i Agriculture Council. He also serves the Kohala community as President of the North Kohala Community Resource Center.

New Interim ADC Board Member, Dean Okimoto (ADC At-Large Board Member)

Dean Okimoto graduated from 'Iolani High School in Honolulu, HI in 1972 then continued his education at University of Redlands, in Redlands, CA earning a B.A. in Political Science. He came back to the family farm and in 1983 became Chairman and President of 'Nalo Greens. In 1986 after growing green onions, daikon, and American parsley as his father did, and started a hydroponic system to grow lettuces, the opportunity was seized to grow herbs such as basil, tarragon, thyme, and rosemary for the mainland winter market. In 1990, Dean met Roy Yamaguchi and started to grow a mix of baby greens and lettuces called 'Nalo Greens, which with the help of chefs like Roy, made it on to many restaurant menus. At it's peak they serviced over 100 restaurants on Oahu. In 2018 they experienced 4 devastating storms during the year, and had no choice but to shut down 'Nalo Farms. In 2024, Dean formed a partnership with Jason Brand of Kunia Country Farms, to rename the farm 'Nalo Farms, LLC. Currently he is building this business to replace much of the imported lettuces into Hawaii. His intent is to grow, at least 2.5 million pounds of lettuce and 2.5 million pounds of fish. All is aimed at reducing imports. The fish will be processed into fish sticks for the DOE schools and also compete with imported fish sticks in the supermarket venues.

ADC Executive Director, Wendy Gady

Wendy Gady is a visionary leader whose comprehensive experience spans farm management, grant writing, national audits, water management, food safety, and market enhancement. Her upbringing in Iowa's agricultural environment and subsequent immersion in Hawai'i agricultural legacy have equipped her with unique insights and dedication to local food resilience. Wendy's leadership has facilitated new opportunities for agricultural land use, crafted bespoke farm business plans, and bolstered successful farmers' markets. Her commitment to expanding value-added agricultural products and addressing the challenges highlighted by the recent pandemic underscores her forward-thinking approach.

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About Agribusiness Development Corporation

The Agribusiness Development Corporation (“ADC”) is a state agency created in 1994 by the Hawai‘i State Legislature and is administratively attached to the Hawai‘i Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism. Its mission is to conserve and convert arable lands and their associated infrastructure that were formerly large mono-crop plantation lands into new, productive uses. The agency’s ultimate goal is to ensure that agricultural production and agribusiness ventures will be responsive to the current food and other agricultural needs of the state of Hawai‘i.

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