



# AgriBusiness Development Corporation Newsletter

## July 2024



## ADC Welcomes New Leadership



On July 1, Agribusiness Development Corporation welcomed the following new Board members, all with diverse expertise in agriculture (left to right):

New Chairperson Lyle Tabata

New Vice Chairperson Jason Okuhama

New ADC Board Member Jesse Cooke

New Interim ADC Board Member, Nathan Trump (Hawai'i County)

New Interim ADC Board Member, Dean Okimoto

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## Meet the New Board:

### **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 KQY-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. 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 and 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. Jason 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, Small Business Administration loan programs, and commercial real estate financing. The regions that Mr. Okuhama covers include Hawai'i, 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 Hawai'i and Pacific Territories.

Before joining Bank of America, Mr. Okuhama served as a 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. In addition, he was previously on the board of directors for the Hawaii Community Development Authority and for the Aloha Tower Development Corporation. He was board president of his residential condo association, and treasurer of his commercial condo association.

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**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. Jesse, appointed as the Honolulu representative on May 1, offers crucial guidance on agricultural strategy and local food production sustainability.

**New Interim ADC Board Member, Nathan Trump (Hawai'i 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 Hawai'i'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 serves the Kohala community as president of the North Kohala Community Resource Center.

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

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 BA 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, he 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 many restaurant menus. At its peak, they serviced over 100 restaurants on O'ahu. In 2018, they experienced four devastating storms during the year and had no choice but to shutdown 'Nalo Farms.

In 2024, Dean formed a partnership with Jason Brand of Kunia Country Farms, to rename the farm as 'Nalo Farms, LLC. Currently, he is building this business to replace much of the imported lettuces into Hawai'i. His intent is to grow at least 2.5 million pounds of lettuce and 2.5 million pounds of fish. All efforts are aimed at reducing imports. The fish will be processed into fish sticks for Hawai'i Department of Education schools and compete with imported fish sticks in the supermarket venues.

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### 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.

## ADC Board On the Move in Hawai'i



(Left to right) ADC Board Members visit Kaua'i: Jason Okuhama, Glenn Hong, and Jesse Cooke, with Umi Farm's Umi Martin and ADC Executive Director Wendy Gady.

The ADC Board of Directors have been on the move after being assigned to Permitted Interaction Groups. The Land Permitted Interaction Group includes Jason Okuhama, Glenn Hong, and Jesse Cooke. They visited the ADC Kekaha farm tenants, including Umi Martin of Umi's Farm, a high-density fruit farm with a broad range of Hawai'i tropical fruits. Martin is leading locally and nationally as an active member of the National Mango Board, traveling to DC to share ideas and strategies with growers from across the country. Umi shared his farm plan challenges, activities, resources needed and how ADC's long land licenses are the foundation for his success.





“Without ADC’s multiple year license structure, I would not have been able to make the investments needed for orchard crop development for my community. I am now at a point where I can scale trees across my entire assigned acres.”  
 — Umi Martin, Umi’s Farm, Kaua‘i

The ADC Distribution Services Permitted Interaction Group consisting of Glenn Hong, Ryan Kanakaole, Lyle Tabata and Sharon Hurd, also traveled on a Saturday, spending the entire day getting an overview of the water and hydropower electrical distribution systems across the 12,000 acres under ADC in west Kaua‘i.

The group reviewed maps, capital investments over the past five years, agribusiness users’ challenges and needs for the future. ADC is in the process of adding the East Kaua‘i Irrigation System to the asset portfolio in the months to come, as well as adding positions on the Garden Isle. New ADC Chair Lyle Tabata shared, “We are excited to see the addition of local state jobs in the form of an ADC Kaua‘i Property Manager, Kaua‘i Water Manager, and three positions as Water Workers and the impact these future employees will be making on the next 100 years of local food production in Kaua‘i. We exist to support our local farms and agribusinesses, and these positions in conjunction with the coming new licenses to be awarded by the Board provide a strong foundation for Kaua‘i food future.”

The ADC Value-Added Permitted Interaction Group, including Dane Wicker, Jesse Cooke and Jason Okuhama, recently toured the newly opened Wahiawā Value-Added Product Development Center, whose facility and footprint is owned by ADC. The facility houses a high-pressure processing machine which locks in nutritional value while extending food shelf life for up to four months for value-added food processing. “I was excited to learn how this opens opportunities for preservative-free products, from smoothies, to hummus, salsa, and baby food, and how it is also being used in the meat and seafood industry,” shared ADC Vice Chair Okuhama.



## DLIR Sponsors Summer Interns to Work with ADC

The Department of Labor and Industrial Relations-Workforce Development Division (DLIR-WDD) coordinated a high school interns program this summer. The students have joined ADC staff for a 6-week internship program. Francis “Frankie” Empeno (center) toured with McKinley High students Adleigh Bumanglag (‘26), and Claudelle Bayawa (‘25) who have been on site to help re-organize and catalogue ADC office files and have been key to ADC establishing a new file management system for all documents.



## More 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.