



Agribusiness Development Corporation

# AG NOTES

## August 2025 Newsletter

### SPOTLIGHT ON UMI'S FARM – KEKAHA, KAUA'I

#### *From Kekaha to the World*

Born and raised in Kekaha, Umi Martin always knew higher education was part of his journey. After earning a Bachelor's in Psychology from Missouri Valley College, he lived in Detroit and Oregon before returning home.

At the University of Hawai'i, he was introduced to agriculture, becoming caretaker of a taro patch. "I spent most of my time in the patch," Martin recalls. That hands-on experience inspired him to farm his family's old kuleana land in Waimea. Starting with just one acre, he experimented with taro, then shifted focus to mangoes and avocados on his uncle's advice.



#### Quick Facts: Umi's Farm

- Location: Waimea, Kaua'i
- Started: 1-acre taro patch → mango orchard
- Year Store Opened: 2014
- Mango Trees: From 50 grafted trees to an expanding orchard
- National Role: Serving his second term on the National Mango Board



#### *Planting the Seeds of a Business*

By 2012, Umi knew he needed a business plan to succeed. He entered the Kaua'i Coffee Business Plan Competition, which gave him the framework to move forward.

Still without land, he pursued opportunities through the Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC). In 2014, he submitted his application, and by 2016 he secured a land agreement.

Umi started small, grafting 50 trees before expanding. Meanwhile, he balanced substitute teaching, farming, and working evenings at a small store he opened in 2014 to help fund his dream.

#### *Scaling Up the Mango Industry*

Today, Umi is focused on scaling mango production to meet growing demand. While value-added products are in his long-term vision, his immediate priority is increasing yields.

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Through the Hawai'i Tropical Fruit Growers (HTFG), Umi applied to the National Mango Board—where he now serves as one of only two representatives. His global work has taken him to the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, where he's witnessed how small-scale operations transformed into multi-million-pound industries in just decades.



*"I've seen how islands with limited resources, like the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, build thriving mango industries. Hawai'i can do the same."*

### Looking Ahead

With Kaua'i's unique climate and agricultural heritage, Umi envisions expanding Hawai'i's mango industry. In 2026, he hopes to help host the Hawai'i Tropical Fruit Growers Conference on Kaua'i, showcasing the island's potential to national and international partners.

From a humble taro patch to a global mango board seat, Umi's Farm proves what vision, persistence, and family roots can achieve.



## BRANCHING OUT TO THE NEIGHBOR ISLANDS: ADC BOARD OF DIRECTORS VISITS KAUA'I

In an effort to engage communities and the agribusiness industry entrepreneurs and producers across the state, ADC will hold its monthly board meetings on the neighbor islands over the coming months.

The first of the three neighbor island meetings was held August 25 on Kaua'i at the Kekaha Agricultural Processing Building. ADC currently operates and manages over 16,000 acres of farmlands in Kalepa and Kekaha.

In its mission to assist local farmers on Kaua'i, the ADC board during the meeting approved a license agreement to Taworn Panyamee and Thanawat Chak Ano for 60 acres of ADC property for agriculture use in the Kekaha area. Presentations were also given by members Corteva, Kekaha Agriculture Association, Aloun Kaua'i Farming LLC, Hawaii State Department of Transportation, and Kalepa Coalition regarding recent ag-related activities and priorities.

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Following the meeting, the board had the opportunity to tour ADC properties and various projects in and around Kekaha. This included the Kekaha bridges scheduled for replacement; fallow ADC land scheduled for future ag production; and Grove Farm, in which a recently approved purchase of 1,000 acres there will help ADC satisfy the demand from farmers who applied for ADC farm licenses.



ADC is also beefing up its team on Kaua'i, with recent hires of Water Manager Deo Rhoden and Property Manager Alison Neustein.

Rhoden joins ADC as a Waimea High School graduate and Kaua'i resident with over 18 years of experience working with water systems on Kaua'i and O'ahu. Neustein, also a Kaua'i resident, has extensive experience managing ag lands, commercial properties and water systems.

After holding its September meeting on O'ahu, the ADC board will meet on Maui in October and on Hawai'i Island in November. Residents are encouraged to attend and participate.

Board meetings are regularly held on the third Thursday of the month. Please check the ADC website for the monthly agenda and locations details. To view the meeting agendas, go to [www.dbedt.hawaii.gov/adc/meetings](http://www.dbedt.hawaii.gov/adc/meetings).

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## ADC BOARD ELECTS NEW LEADERSHIP, WELCOMES NEW MEMBER FROM KAUA'I

Our ADC Board of Directors recently elected **Jayson Watts** as our new chair, signaling a renewed commitment to strategic leadership, critical infrastructure investment and long-term land stewardship.

Watts, representing the county of Maui on the ADC board, currently serves as director of environmental health and safety at Mahi Pono, a Maui-based farming company. He was first appointed to the ADC board by Governor Josh Green, M.D., in 2022 and recently began a second four-year term on the board.

Watts brings a leadership style focused on collaboration, measurable results and delivering for Hawai'i's working farmers, ranchers and food producers. He previously served in various government and agricultural policy roles, including special assistant to the director of the Hawai'i Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, senior advisor to two lieutenant governors, assistant sergeant at arms at the Hawai'i State Senate and staff assistant to the late U.S. Representative Patsy T. Mink.



He serves in multiple leadership roles, including secretary of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau and vice chair of the Hawai'i Food Industry Association.

"The ADC is entering one of the most ambitious phases in its history," said Brian Miyamoto, executive director of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau. "With renewed commitments from the executive and legislative branches, this board – under Jayson's leadership – is positioned to accelerate long-overdue investments in water security, land access and local food production. His commitment to transparency, collaboration and maximizing the expertise of board members will be critical to that success."

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**Jason Okuhama**, serving on the ADC board as an at-large member, will continue as vice chair. Okuhama is the managing partner of Commercial and Business Lending, a commercial loan broker company established in 2000. The company specializes in loan programs and commercial real estate financing from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Farm Service Agency, USDA Rural Development and the U.S. Small Business Administration.

The ADC board also welcomed **David Hinazumi** as its newest member representing the county of Kaua'i. Hinazumi is a senior vice president at Grove Farm Company, Incorporated, a land management and development company. He started at Grove Farm in 2004 and is primarily responsible for managing development projects and has experience with agricultural leases and infrastructure improvements.

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## HELPING GROW OUR AG INDUSTRY:

### *Senate President, Ways and Means Committee get update from ADC on Kaua'i*

The Hawaii Senate Committee on Ways and Means travelled to Kaua'i earlier this month for a comprehensive update from the Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC) on the development of Hawai'i's food and product innovation efforts to help scale up local farmers and entrepreneurs and increase economic resilience.

State Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism Deputy Director Dane Wicker, along with other members from ADC, DBEDT, University of Hawai'i Community Design Center (UHCDC), and the Hawai'i State Department of Health (DOH) gathered near the historic Kaua'i Plantation Railway in Lihu'e for a site visit and briefing on the strategic plan guiding the Food and Product Innovation Network (FPIN). Discussions focused on regional coordination, infrastructure development, and the launch of a pilot on Kaua'i that integrates processing equipment, workforce training, and business support services.

"The FPIN is critical to building a resilient and self-sustaining economy for Hawai'i," said Wicker, who also sits on the ADC board of directors. "By investing in the infrastructure, facilities, equipment, and wraparound services our local businesses need, we are not only creating new small and medium-sized enterprises—we're supporting existing companies, expanding our Hawai'i Made program, and strengthening initiatives like farm-to-school and farm-to-state."

The Hawai'i FPIN initiative draws inspiration from New Zealand's public-private innovation model and includes strategic investments across the islands. Recent legislative support includes the passage of Act 237, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2025, establishing FPIN, Act 250, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2025, appropriating \$350,000 for program coordination, and Act 230, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2024, dedicating \$2 million for a new agricultural processing facility in Kekaha.

"The Senate recognizes that agriculture is not just about farming – it's about food security, economic opportunity, and sustaining our way of life," said Senate President Ronald D. Kouchi (D – 8, Kaua'i, Ni'ihau). "We've supported a wide range of agricultural initiatives championed by our farmers, local business owners, and community leaders, and it is encouraging to see necessary steps being taken to expand our export capacity and provide more locally grown food on the tables for our schools and hospitals. These are the kinds of forward-thinking efforts that can transform Hawai'i's agricultural economy and create lasting benefits for our islands."



# ADC IN THE COMMUNITY

## *Hawai'i State Farm Fair*

ADC in July hosted the Hawai'i Farm Bureau's Hawai'i State Farm Fair just outside of Wahiawā. The event held on ADC-managed lands in Whitmore Village drew thousands to learn firsthand and up-close the diversity of agriculture and to meet the current and future producers of locally-grown and produced food items.

Mahalo to the Hawai'i Farm Bureau and to all who participated and attended!



## *Wahiawā Value-Added Product Development Center*

The Wahiawā Value-Added Product Development Center and its High Pressure Processing (HPP) machine represent a critical first step in modernizing Hawaii's food system. In July, ADC participated in Leeward Community College's first HPP Summit, which brought together local producers, food entrepreneurs, scientists, and industry leaders to learn about how this technology can extend shelf life, open export markets, and strengthen food safety.

This pilot phase is essential, but it is just the beginning. ADC is applying the lessons learned here to lead the next phase: the development of a larger, fully operational HPP facility and an innovation space designed to serve Hawaii's farmers, ranchers, and food entrepreneurs.

By scaling this model, ADC is working to ensure that Hawaii-grown products can compete in national and international markets while creating new opportunities for local producers to add value, reduce waste, and build sustainable businesses. Our role is to transform pilot projects into permanent infrastructure that drives the future of Hawaii agriculture.

