

Hawai'i Farmers Share Their Experiences With NRCS

Benefits, Obstacles, and Lessons Learned

MEET THE FARMERS



Credit: John Vass

Makili Farm

Kathy Vass

Kealahakua, Hawai'i

Read more: bit.ly/makilifarmblog



Credit: Terri Dux, NRCS

Farm of the Fearless Monkey

Maigee Chang

Kailua, Hawai'i

Read more: bit.ly/fearlessandsunshineblog



Credit: Sunshine Farm Foundation

Sunshine Farm Foundation

Timothy Clark

Mokulē'ia, Hawai'i

NRCS PROGRAMS ACCESSED:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP): Equipment reimbursements (hoop houses).

Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP): Enhanced agroforestry, cover cropping, crop rotation, organic pest control, mulching.

Context & Challenges: Farming in Hawai'i brings high operational costs, inclement weather, and persistent weed and pest pressure. Top pests include: coconut rhinoceros beetle, avocado lace bug, and coffee berry borer.

Why access NRCS support: For each of these farmers, NRCS programs offered financial and technical support for organic practices they were already doing or planned to do.

Working with NRCS from application to implementation: Start by connecting with your local NRCS representatives and asking what support is available based on your farm's size and goals.

"Find out what's available, ask questions, and hang in there." – Kathy Vass

ADVICE TO FARMERS

Kathy Vass: "Persevere. Explore as many USDA and other avenues of financial support as possible; advocate for what you need. **Plug into local farming community:** farmers, Extension, farmers' unions."

Maigee Chang: "The most important thing [is] having a relationship with the agent and being able to ask questions at any time, knowing that you're not going to get in trouble or get lost in the system."

Tim Clark: "When you're preparing the paperwork, think long term. Consider the next five years and what needs to be a part of your application. **Apply with as comprehensive a plan as possible.**"



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Key Takeaways

"If farmers are considering applying for CSP, you should totally do it. One, because it's good practice. And two, it's a good program. For a farm of my size, it wasn't that complicated." –Maigee Chang, Farm of the Fearless Monkey

on their farm and select a conservation enhancement that best fits their needs.

Timeline

1. Contact NRCS

Discuss conservation goals and eligibility.

2. Register with FSA

Enter your farm into the USDA's system.

3. Make a Plan

Select your conservation enhancement.

4. Complete Paperwork

Certain documentation is required before starting.

5. Implement Your Practice

NRCS will do a site visit to your farm.

6. Receive Payment

Farmers will be reimbursed in a lump sum.



Lesson: Lean on Community

In addition to developing a strong relationship with your local NRCS agents, don't forget outreach to other farmers, farmers' unions, and Extension agents to share experiences and get advice on what programs and support are available.



Lesson: Plan Ahead

When preparing your CSP paperwork, consider the next five years and build as comprehensive a plan as possible. Including multiple conservation practices will potentially give your application a higher ranking and likelihood of success.



Consideration: Paperwork

Keeping thorough and organized records and receipts for your farm will help in the planning and reimbursement process. Ask your NRCS representative for support understanding the application and your final contract.



Working with NRCS

Despite fluctuations in NRCS staffing, these farmers spoke highly of their supportive and responsive NRCS agents and the expertise they provided. To facilitate a successful process, know your goals, ask plenty of questions, and persevere.

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