

39. Anahola Homesteaders Council: Dryland Taro, Kaua'i 2/98-9/00

Jimmie Torio is a community activist with no end to his list of projects designed to help the Native Hawaiian population. He created an agriculture-oriented working group comprised of former sugar workers as well as Native Hawaiian farmers. Using RETA-H grant funds, they began with short-term crops (i.e., lettuce, beans, corn, cucumber, etc.) while developing a substantial dry-land taro production on former sugar lands owned by the State Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL). As production increased, so did new funding resources leading to the construction of two commercial greenhouses, a warehouse and packing facility and improved administration building.

"Expanding agricultural opportunities started by the RETA-H program has transformed the organization into a statewide USDA farmers cooperative calling itself Island Farmers Cooperative (IFC)", according to Torio. He is also working on a newly formed partnership between the USDA and the IFC in growing cacao in Hawai'i. Their organization has also diversified into beekeeping with their Kaua'i-based AHC apiary expanding to O'ahu and Hawai'i islands. In an East Kaua'i farmers meeting in December, Torio was quoted as saying: "Had it not been for the opportunity created by the RETA-H program, our project would not have gone as far as it has."

40. Kulana Foods: Slaughterhouse and Cold Storage Facility, Hilo 2/98-12/99

Although grass-fed beef produced in Hawai'i has an excellent taste, it has few of the finishing touches available to beef on the mainland. In addition, limited storage makes it difficult to handle the slaughtering process efficiently. To expand both their ability to slaughter local beef and to age the carcasses, RETA-H funds were requested to cover allowable expenses while the company invested their own money to build a large cooling/aging room. Once completed (in 2003), this cooler will increase the facility's capacity by 33% and improve the quality of their product.

41. Lihu'e Plantation Company: Diversified Agriculture, Kaua'i 4/98-12/99

Senator Inouye's expressed concern about the potential closing of Amfac's Lihu'e Plantation was not only due to his genuine concern about the loss of jobs. The plantation's pumps and bagass-generated electricity that drives those pumps keep the access to Barking Sands Pacific Missile Range and the surrounding farmland from flooding. Funding was provided for the Plantation to keep functioning while studying the potential of diversified agriculture (alfalfa, mango, papaya, corn, etc.). Some of the results from this project provided valuable information for Pioneer Mill when it closed a year later, and some of the crops developed from this project are still being grown on Kaua'i by private farmers that were associated with Amfac before it closed.

42. Ahualoa Cheese: Cheese Production, Hamakua 5/98-12/99

Bahman Sadeghi owned a small dairy in Ahualoa with his brother. When he saw dairies dump milk for one reason or another he saw a valuable resource being wasted. He began making cheese with small amounts of milk, and at one point was able to turn a major loss on unwanted milk into a product that was more valuable than the milk would have been if it had been sold. Sadeghi applied for a RETA-H grant to increase the cheese making ability both in volume and in the variety of cheeses produced. Although not much cheese has been produced over the last few years (demand for milk is too high), Sadeghi says "I would never have taken the chance to grow my [new] dairy so rapidly if I didn't have the cheese factory as a safety net". Based on that, his marked success at his new dairy (see Island Dairy, project # 51) is partially due to this capability. Undoubtedly, at some time in the future, milk that would otherwise be lost will end up in the local stores as locally made cheese.