

A Message from Betty A. Davis

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Hope can come in many forms and will mean different things to a variety of different people and organizations. One of the primary goals of the RETA-H program was to provide hope and a sense of responsibility to the people of Hawai'i after the closure of the majority of their sugar cane plantations and mills resulting in a large number of displaced workers. Many, if not most, of these workers had been associated with sugar cane most of their life. In some areas the sugar cane fields benefited the Department of Defense (DoD) bases by serving as a natural agricultural barrier and now those fields were being abandoned.

In response to this difficult and alarming situation, Senator Daniel Inoyue proposed a mutually beneficial collaboration between DoD, USDA, and Hawai'i that gave birth to the RETA-H program. The RETA-H program was borne out of the successful collaborative relationship that has existed between the United States and Hawai'i since the Reciprocity Treaty of 1875 was signed. Hawai'i's Pacific location affords it a critical strategic role for the DoD as the United States' bridge to Asia. The DoD has developed strategic command, force and logistical capabilities on the islands of Hawai'i that is crucial to overall DoD preparedness. This beneficial collaboration partnered with the mission, leadership, and resources within the USDA made for a successful and determined team of collaborators.

Providing hope and funding efforts of mutual benefit for all parties involved heralded the success of the RETA-H effort. Soon, instead of neglected sugar cane fields, we saw other forms of agriculture taking hold and proposals that included hiring displaced sugar cane workers and were composed of interesting and novel ideas. The transition to diversified agriculture was actually happening, especially in Ka'u and along the Hamakua Coast on the Island of Hawai'i.

The RETA-H program has been mutually beneficial to the DoD as well as Hawai'i. DoD's direct participation in some of the projects has ensured that the availability of strategic locations for training and staging remain viable. The "Waste Water Effluent" project focused on the study of the present discharge of sewage effluent from Schofield Army Barracks as a potential reuse method into the irrigation supply system. The project also assisted the military by providing a workable and affordable system of secondary effluent wastewater disposal. In Kaua'i the "Diversified Crops" project directly addressed the potential problems a Lihue Plantation closure would have on the Barking Sands Missile Range. Other projects while not having direct military relevance helped to provide a working knowledge of diversified agriculture as well as the ability to provide consistently superior agricultural products to the local commissaries and restaurants. Also, some of the recipients of RETA-H funds have successfully participated in food shows and expositions.

It is evident that the feeling of despair and helplessness over the closure of the sugar cane plantations is slowly evaporating. The agricultural transition is slowly taking form and the success of the RETA-H program is being realized. Providing hope and a feeling of importance and confidence takes time but the fruits of the RETA-H seeds are starting to take root and blossom. RETA-H has opened the door to numerous agricultural possibilities and entrepreneurial opportunities for a multitude of displaced sugar workers as well as innovative ways to utilize the abandoned sugar cane fields. Senator Inoyue's vision and belief in this program was not unfounded and provided rays of hope for the people of Hawai'i.