



**A Message From Bill Paty**  
RETA-H Oversight Committee Chairman

As an experienced cane farmer, I watched the gradual demise of the sugar industry in Hawai'i as one sugar company after another closed its mill and, with it, the thousands of acres of sugar lands associated with them. When those lands were laid fallow, along with them went a way of life on the plantation that went back well over a century. Hundreds of sugar workers with strong work ethics, skilled in growing sugar cane and mechanics of sugar production, were unemployed.

Recognizing this, Senator Daniel Inouye undertook the establishment of the RETA-H Program in an effort to maintain the extensive agricultural lands that were so productive in the past and to provide an opportunity to continue to use the varied agricultural skills of the former plantation worker.

In conjunction with the US Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Defense, the RETA-H Oversight Committee and a small, dedicated staff undertook the large challenge to find ways and means to maintain their lands in agriculture and to promote employment for the sugar workers.

The guidelines were strict. Those proposing to use the sugar lands had to develop a sound business plan and demonstrate that they had the experience and background to develop a successful venture. Funding was made available by the Oversight Committee only after the Committee was satisfied that the venture had a reasonable chance of meeting its financial, production and marketing goals.

The first chairman, Monty Richards, ran a tight ship and set the standards for the program. The Oversight Committee, a strong coalition composed of people knowledgeable in agriculture, marketing and financial matters, put applicants through the "ringer" in an effort to assure that they had a sound business working plan. The program funded dozens of entrepreneurial ventures covering a wide range of agricultural products utilizing over 17,000 acres of former sugar lands and setting the stage for an ever increasing utilization of this agricultural base.

It would not have been possible without the active support and review of the State Director for Hawai'i Small Business Development Center, Darryl Mleynek, and Program Director, Robert Chase. Paula Helfrich, President of the Hawai'i Island Economic Development Board, and Dennis Terinishi and their team were most effective in moving the program to success.

I regard my opportunity to chair the RETA-H Oversight Committee as a unique opportunity to work with a great team and be able to look back and say: "Yes, I think together we made a difference, albeit a small one, in the well being of our state".