



CAPITOL CONNECTION

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Courtesy Tyler Kruse

Staying focused on affordable housing, local ag

When we're knee-deep in day-to-day issues, it's hard to think about the future. Yet that's the challenge for state departments and the governor as they balance needs to move forward on long-term goals. This edition provides updates in two key areas — affordable housing, including Hawaiian Home Lands projects, and local food production — to prepare for the years ahead.

Q. Should we be concerned about balancing land for affordable housing and local agriculture production?

A. I don't really see a conflict between more affordable housing and agriculture since we have enough acreage from former plantation lands to do both. What we're hoping for in this agriculture renaissance is changing from exporting products to focusing on what we can grow here to consume. It means looking at what we can grow in the islands and how to use a combination of traditional farming, new technology for higher yields, and public-private partnerships for larger capital investments.



Q. What do you want people to know about diversified ag progress in Central O'ahu?

A. I was very encouraged and inspired by the productivity and dedication of farmers like Larry Jeffs, Shin Ho and Fred Lau, owner of Mari's Garden. They're smart, entrepreneurial, and carrying on a proud family farming tradition. It's great to see multi-generational farms being perpetuated, even with all the challenges. Now with programs such as 'Aina Pono in the public schools and a new farm-to-state initiative, I see a lot of opportunities for farmers to provide healthy options for our community. The state needs to lead by example and look for ways we can support local farmers.



(top) Kulana Hale in Kapolei will include affordable rentals for families and seniors. In Kunia, Gov. Ige visits Larry Jeffs on his family-owned farm.

Q. Are you encouraged by housing projects such as Kulana Hale in Kapolei and several Department of Hawaiian Home Lands projects in the pipeline?

A. Yes, we're seeing definite progress for affordable units in all demographics. Kulana Hale is one example of a public-private partnership that will help working families and seniors. DHHL now has the highest operating budget it's ever had, which means we're increasing staff to deliver more timely projects. The capital improvement dollars are significantly higher than in the past, and we've revised policies so we can provide more infrastructure support for department projects. DHHL has recently completed new administrative rules to allow rentals on Hawaiian Home Lands. These rules will be implemented in the department's first high-rise project at 820 Isenberg Street, giving beneficiaries an affordable housing option in urban Honolulu.

Q. When we talk about "sustainability" for the state, what do you hope future Hawai'i residents will see?

A. We've begun this transformation toward sustainability for Hawai'i in the broadest sense. We need to stop sending our dollars out of state and creating jobs somewhere else. We need to invest in our community. Sustainability ripples through the entire economy. It's agriculture, it's the environment, it's energy, it's jobs in all sectors. In 2019, we may think the goals we've set aren't achievable, but we've shown we can make progress. The hope is that, if we're strategic and focused and work together as a community to tackle them, we can reach our goals.

More options available for DHHL beneficiaries

From turn-key homes to vacant lots for maximum flexibility, the state's Department of Hawaiian Home Lands is ramping up its offerings to beneficiaries. Among them were **16 lots on Lāna'i** and **15 lots within the Kakaina subdivision in Waimānalo.**

"Waimānalo is a place where there is great beneficiary demand in relation to how much land we have in the area," said DHHL chair William Ailā, Jr. "We're in the process of acquiring an additional 80-acre parcel of land for a future combination of residential and possibly subsistence agriculture lots."



Lāna'i beneficiaries look over some of the most recent DHHL lot choices.



The Johnson 'ohana celebrate their new home with director Ailā.

Lāna'i recipients said their lots were especially significant to residents. "To be given an opportunity to have homelands on an island that is 90 percent owned by a corporation — that is very important," said Solomon Kaho'ohalahala, who was offered a lot. "More importantly, we are fulfilling a commitment to the kupuna, that their children and their grandchildren and their mo'opuna yet unborn will be recipients of this kind of program." DHHL has a total of 50 acres of land on Lāna'i. In addition to the 16 lots already offered, the department plans to develop an additional 79 lots on the island.

Also, **37 turn-key homes will be built in Kanehili subdivision in Kapolei** — the result of beneficiary interest in ready-to-live homes. These lots are among 395 DHHL is awarding statewide for 2019. DHHL has over 1,300 lots in its production pipeline, which are expected to be completed over the next five years.

In addition, DHHL partnered with the **Honolulu Habitat for Humanity** to help the Johnson 'ohana build a new six-bedroom, three-bath home in Waimānalo. More than 500 local volunteers helped with the project. "This is the biggest home we've ever built, and it wouldn't have been possible without the dedicated people who were a part of it," said Habitat executive director Jim Murphy. The house was funded through a zero-interest loan made possible by the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act, administered by DHHL. "The mana that has been placed into this home from every nail pounded will provide the Johnson family strength moving forward. Love and aloha are what will make this house a home," said DHHL director Ailā.

Kulana Hale: Affordable rentals for families, seniors



The future of affordable housing — and Governor Ige's goal of 10,000 new units by 2020 — just got brighter in Kapolei with a groundbreaking recently for a second phase of **Kulana Hale**, a \$130 million senior and multifamily apartment community. The first tower, reserved for seniors 55 and older, is set for completion in April. The second tower for families is projected to be done in early 2021.

Both complexes are intended for residents earning 60 percent or less of area median income (AMI). That equates to \$50,640 for a single person, \$57,840 for a couple and \$72,300 for a family of four. A few units also are available for those earning half as much. The project was praised by officials because it puts affordable rentals within walking distance of businesses and the bus line for access to Kapolei Rail Station.

The project is a public-private partnership with Highridge Costa, based in California, Coastal Rim Properties and the Hawai'i Housing Finance and Development Corp. the state agency that helps produce affordable housing. "**Kulana Hale is a great example of using state funding to attract private investment to benefit local residents,**" said the governor. "My administration is committed to helping seniors and families find housing they can afford." For his part, Highridge Costa president Michael Costa had nothing but praise for the Hawai'i partnership, calling it one of the best he's seen in his experience of building housing in 33 states.



Gov. Ige joins Highridge Costa president Michael Costa, councilmember Kymberly Pine and others at the Kulana Hale Phase II groundbreaking Aug. 28.

Growing ag: Farming for the future in Central O‘ahu

For most of us, increasing local food production sounds like a great idea — especially because the state imports about 85 percent of the food we eat. But how do we grow food on a scale big enough to make a difference? On a recent visit to agriculture operations in Kunia and Mililani, Governor Ige heard from the people who are expanding crop potential every day in Central O‘ahu. They include farmers like Larry Jefts, Shin Ho and Fred Lau and leaders from the state Department of Agriculture (HDOA) and the Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC).

Together, they want to help consumers see the local possibilities as part of a larger network — from traditional farming and high-tech greenhouses to a harvesting and distribution system and UH community college students trying new commercial food ventures as part of their training. **“We need to dispel the myth that nothing is happening with farming in Central O‘ahu,”** said Jefts, one of the state’s most successful commercial growers and among the largest producers of fresh produce. He showed the governor acres of fertile farmland already in production and described some of the challenges he and others face in bringing their fruits and vegetables to market.

Jefts was the first farmer to successfully grow watermelons and bell peppers on lands that had lain fallow when Del Monte stopped pineapple production. This year his Kelena Farms produced more than a million pounds of head cabbage, which is one-and-a-half times larger than the average yield in California, according to HDOA. Jefts’ family-owned farm of 6,000 acres includes watermelons, bananas, bell peppers, tomatoes and cucumbers, as well as cabbage. His Sugarland Farms produces about 80 percent of the state’s tomatoes.



(top) Gov. Ige talks with Larry Jefts, one of the state’s largest diversified ag farmers. At Mari’s Garden, Fred Lau explains his family’s hydroponic growing methods.

“Developing fallow ag lands into high-production farming operations is part of our strategy to increase our food security,” said the governor. **“We want to support more Hawai‘i farmers and show that diversified agriculture can thrive on what used to be plantation lands.”** HDOA director Phyllis Shimabukuro-Geiser said the department is in the process of filling two new positions for a **farm-to-state initiative** to bring Hawai‘i-grown food to island prisons and hospitals — an expansion of the **popular farm-to-school, ‘Aina Pono program** in several public schools. **ADC is managing 1,200 acres from the former Galbraith Estate** and has invested millions to prepare the land for diversified farming in what is being called the Whitmore Project. **“ADC is developing water infrastructure because without water you can’t have farmers,”** said executive director James Nakatani. ADC is also providing 24/7 security in an area designated for small farmers to protect equipment from theft. The land is sub-divided into lots of varying sizes — from five to 90 acres — each with its own reservoir for water and farms in various stages of development.



Shin Ho describes the challenges farmers face.

Shin Ho of Ho Farms leases 62 acres in the area. **“We mainly grow cherry tomatoes, eggplant, okra and Japanese cucumbers,”** she said. **“We’re also planning to plant about 1,000 avocado trees.”** Ho said her family has been farming since 1991, and she and her brother have been doing it full-time for about 13 years. She said she appreciates the 24-hour security because it allows her to focus on her farming. **“We deal with break-ins every day at our other parcels so the arrangement here is a blessing.”**

Jefts and his wife took their own leap of faith when they left the Midwest and moved to Hawai‘i in 1978. **“We didn’t know anybody, but we started farming on Moloka‘i, thanks to a Hawaiian family who ‘adopted’ us. We were there for 10 years before coming to O‘ahu.”** With his years of experience, Jefts helps other farmers and works with his son, Jonathan, to keep the business in the family. He maintains farming is a business, not a lifestyle. But to hear him and the others talk, it’s obvious that working the land is in their blood. Never mind the hard labor, finding good workers, fighting off bugs, maintaining a marketing, packaging and distribution system, and keeping thieves from stealing equipment — all while trying to make a profit.

So what does it take to be a farmer entrepreneur? **“Pure, raw struggle to figure out the business side of things,”** said Jefts. **“Farmers need to understand the ramifications of their next purchase. You have to be a calculated risk-taker, but you also have to be a realist. And you have to love what you do.”**

'Ohana Readers to launch for Moloka'i's youngest keiki

"Giving our youngest children an opportunity to love reading is one of the best ways we can contribute to a child's future success in school and life."

— *First lady Dawn Amano-Ige*

Moloka'i families with young children will soon be receiving free books in their mailboxes every month, thanks to a project announced recently by first lady Dawn Amano-Ige. The **'Ohana Readers project** will provide free books by mail to children from birth to age 4 and a half through a partnership between local organizers, including the state Department of Human Services (DHS), the Hawai'i Library system, Friends of the Library, the office of Rep. Lynn DeCoite, Read to Me International, other community groups, and the **Dolly Parton Imagination Library**.



"We know that the early years are a critical time for a child's brain development. I wanted to be able to build on that by encouraging families to read together and build in valuable bonding time," said Mrs. Ige. Parents may sign up for this program at **Kualapu'u School's 'Ohana Fun Fair on Oct. 19** so they can begin receiving books on a regular basis. Part of the costs will be covered by a federal grant administered through DHS and the Learning to Grow program. Children enrolled in the program will receive quality, age-appropriate books in their mailboxes once a month.



Mrs. Ige reads to young children at the Moloka'i Public Library.

"The books have positive messages, such as 'The Little Engine That Could,'" said Mary Ann Nemoto, Learning to Grow project administrator. "Being read to by people they love creates positive family bonds for children and fosters opportunities for them to learn and grow — especially as they make the transition to kindergarten." Mrs. Ige said the idea is also to connect families to the state's public library system and encourage children to read more.

Dolly Parton may be best known for her music, but she said she created the Imagination Library as a tribute to her father, who never learned to read. "He was the smartest man I have ever known, but his inability to read probably kept him from fulfilling all his dreams," said Parton on her website. The Imagination Library has grown into a worldwide program that gives a book a month to well over 1 million children worldwide. For more information, contact Leah Belmonte at leah.m.belmonte@hawaii.gov or Kui Adolpho at (808) 567-9050.

Marking time for the future

In 2069, a group of citizens will gather around a sealed metal box — the State Time Capsule — to reveal community artifacts and letters from Governor Ige and former President Barack Obama as sons of Hawai'i. A ceremony to mark the sealing of the capsule drew the governor and Mrs. Ige, government leaders and members of the public who made suggestions for what could best represent life in Hawai'i as we know it today. The ceremony was part of a celebration of the **50th anniversary of the State Capitol**, chaired by Sen. Brian Taniguchi.

Governor Ige said his letter shared **"our collective vision for a sustainable Hawai'i,"** addressed to the 2069 governor of the state. "It's a vision we have worked so hard to launch: a Hawai'i more resilient and more self-reliant," he said. The governor encouraged everyone "to continue to create a vibrant economy; transform our schools; develop new, clean energy technologies; create new agricultural opportunities; new housing solutions; and revolutionary transportation options. Together, we can shape our own destiny and create a better future for everyone."



The Taniguchis with grandson Roycen and the Iges by the State Capitol plaque.

HAWAII ANNUAL CODE CHALLENGE

Kick-off - Saturday, Oct. 19

Workshops - Saturday, Oct. 26, Nov. 2

Team presentations/judging and awards-

Saturday, Nov. 16 For details, go to hacc.hawaii.gov

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