

For Immediate Release—August 14, 2008

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Kohala Center awarded County grant to draft ag plan

The Kohala Center has received a grant from the County's Department of Research and Development to draft a Hawaii County Agriculture Development Plan and invites community input in the plan's draft and review processes.

The Kohala Center partners in this effort with Agricon Hawaii LLC, an Island-based agribusiness consulting firm with expertise in tropical agriculture. A group of community and agriculture industry experts is being invited to participate in an ad hoc committee to design the comprehensive agriculture development plan.

"The Kohala Center is honored to be working with the County to provide information and analysis on a topic of such major importance as agriculture, especially in this rapidly changing economic and social environment," said Matt Hamabata, executive director of The Kohala Center. "Many changes have occurred on this island since the last Agriculture Development Plan was developed and adopted in 1992, not least of which is the demise of the sugar industry."

"The County of Hawaii's Department of Research and Development is pleased that The Kohala Center is leading this initiative to bring together the island's agricultural industry and community to update the County's Agriculture Plan," said Jane Testa, director of Research and Development. "The agricultural industry has been hugely successful in transitioning from a plantation focus to full diversification. Yet today, market forces and resource allocations at the global, national and local levels are driving significant changes that require further transformation.

"The leadership and technical skill sets of The Kohala Center's Board of Directors, staff and contractors will serve the County well in surfacing the commercial agricultural industry's core issues that the County has authority and resources to address. The resulting plan will guide the County in terms of resource allocation, policy development and advocacy towards a more sustainable Hawaii Island economy," Testa said.

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Community meetings will be held around the island in September. Meetings will be from 6:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m. at the following locations:

Monday, September 8, at U.H.-Hilo (Room 301)

Tuesday, September 9, Naalehu Community Center

Wednesday, September 10, Keaau Community Center

Monday, September 15, N. Hawaii Education & Research Center, Honokaa

Tuesday, September 16, Yano Hall, Captain Cook

Wednesday, September 17, Hawaiian Homes Hall, Waimea

For further information on the community meetings or the Hawaii County Agriculture Development Plan, contact The Kohala Center, 808-887-6411, info@KohalaCenter.org or www.KohalaCenter.org.

Coupled with the effort to develop a new County Agriculture Development Plan, The Kohala Center is partnering with the Redlands Institute in developing a computerized Agricultural Geographical Data Base for the County that will identify agricultural lands with their characteristics and potentials for crop production. This state-of-the-art system will serve to inform county decision-makers and other community users on best practices in land use planning and zoning efforts.

“This is a resource for perpetuating the island’s agricultural industry,” said Margarita “DayDay” Hopkins, economic development specialist in charge of agriculture for Research and Development. “With this planning tool, we will be able to identify the areas with zoned agricultural lands that are more sustainable and suitable for agricultural production, based on temperature, precipitation, elevation and other factors.” Funds were made available by supplemental budget appropriations by the County Council.

The Kohala Center is an independent, not-for-profit center for research and education *about* and *for* the environment, and respectfully engages Hawaii Island as the world’s most vibrant classroom and laboratory for humanity. The Center operates in partnership with Island experts and experts from national and international universities and research agencies to assist communities on Hawaii Island, in the Pacific, and around the world to thrive—ecologically, economically, culturally, and socially.