

## Natural Resources Conservation Service to hold Soil Health Training

*Cheryl Lambert, NRCS, PIA Soil Health Team Leader*

The NRCS will host a series of Soil Health Field Days and classroom sessions for NRCS employees and partners. The goal of the training is to better prepare NRCS conservation planners to improve soil health, and to share NRCS expertise with local agricultural producers and partners. Everyone can help improve soil health given the right tools and knowledge. Since soil is biologically active, it needs water; air, nutrients, minerals and plants to be healthy, but healthy soils also need a diversity of soil microbes and other beneficial organisms. Healthy soils are an important step toward improving the nation's, and Hawaii's, food security.

Five Soil Health Field Days will take place from July 21 to July 31 on O'ahu, Kaua'i, Maui and Hawai'i Island, (Hilo and Waimea). These sessions will offer two hours of classroom instruction followed by hands-on field work to assess soil health at a farm or ranch. Participants will compare soils under different management to see the impacts of land management on the soil. Students are encouraged to "get their hands dirty" and learn how land management is impacting the soil below.

Two full days of class called "Soil Health and Sustainability for Field Staff" are planned on O'ahu and Hawaii Island to cover a broad range of topics, and will be given by two well-known soil experts, David Lamm and Ray Archuleta, from the NRCS National Soil Health Team in Greensboro, North Carolina,. The agenda includes topics such as:

- ▶ Understanding how soil functions;
- ▶ Soil biology and the soil food web;
- ▶ Impacts on soil health by management practices and disturbance;
- ▶ Biodiversity and crops;
- ▶ Keeping the soil covered and the importance of living roots;
- ▶ Ecological approaches to nutrient and weed management; and
- ▶ Energy flows in agricultural systems.

Students will be encouraged to use their sense of sight, smell and feel to evaluate soil health. The class will also study grazing management, crop diversification, and tropical cropping systems in relation to soil health. Soil health testing methods will be learned, as well as overcoming barriers to implementing changes and how to encourage land managers to improve soil health.

Upon conclusion of this training more than 60 NRCS employees and local conservation partners will be better able to work with agricultural producers to improve soil health. Our nation and world's food security and supply depend on abundant, healthy soil to grow crops and feed

animals to feed a growing global population and sustain healthy ecosystems. Improving soil health is a top national priority for the NRCS.

To learn more about the mission of the NRCS, find resources for soil health in the Pacific Islands Area or to ***Unlock the Secrets in the Soil*** you can visit:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detailfull/pia/home/?cid=stelprdb1048783>



NRCS Pacific Islands Area website:

[www.pia.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.pia.nrcs.usda.gov). Contact your local USDA, NRCS Field Office in the county where you are located for technical or financial assistance.

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