Thrive Hawai'i Family Farms
Building Soil Health, Farmer-to-Farmer

For the next feature of our Farmer-to-Farmer Soil Health series, we'd like to introduce Jennifer and Jason Witte of Thrive Hawai'i Family Farms! Upon graduating from GoFarm Hawai'i several years ago, Jennifer and Jason leased a plot of fallow farmland on the North Shore of O'ahu to expand their operation. They have slowly cleared the invasive species, tended the soil, and launched production of food crops including cassava, bok choy, spinach, eggplant, zucchini and other mixed greens and root vegetables to supply their community supported agriculture (CSA) program and local restaurants.

Jennifer and Jason incorporate soil carbon amendments, such as compost and green mulch, install windbreaks, rotate crops, closely manage irrigation, and conduct regular soil testing to guide nutrient application - all to restore the health, function and productivity of their soil. Using slow-release amendments and fertilizers allows Thrive to feed their crops and the soil's ecological system, while preventing excess nutrients from leaching or running-off their farm and into our waterways. Integrating organic and carbon amendments builds nutrient reserves and life in the soil, and enables Thrive to produce an abundance of nutrient dense veggies.

Through participation in the Hawai'i Soil Health Network, Thrive is conducting a trial to explore the pros and cons of integrating biochar into their mixed veggie production beds with the goal of further enhancing their soil's microbial habitat, increasing soil carbon, and potentially increasing water holding capacity. The results and learning lessons from their experimentation with biochar application will be shared through a virtual, farmer-to-farmer platform, as part of an online resource that will continue to grow through the learning and experimentation of farmers throughout Hawai'i.

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Want to Learn About Soil Health in Orchards Systems?

Healthy Soil, Healthy Orchard: from Planning to Practices

Join O'ahu RC&D, CTAHR, and host farm **Island Harvest** for a field day on **Saturday, July 16th from 9:00 am to 12:00pm** in Kapa'au, Hawai'i Island, to engage with soil health planning in orchard systems.

This on-farm workshop will share cover crop trials in an orchard system followed by a demonstration of an AerWay Orchard Aerator and cover crop seeder. Aerators are designed to lessen soil compaction without degrading the soil structure. Reducing compaction and promoting good soil structure can reduce runoff, improve moisture retention, stimulate root growth, and increase yield. We will also discuss soil health planning, practices, testing, and the opportunity for funding from NRCS programs for practice implementation.

Space is limited, please register on Eventbrite by July 9th to reserve your spot!
Register here.

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Farmer-to-Farmer: Island Harvest Shares New Soil Health Practices

Photo: Louise Martin assesses soil compaction using a penetrometer.

In July, O'ahu RC&D collaborated with Island Harvest, the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR), and the USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service (NRCS) to offer Hawai'i Island farmers an educational workshop focused on building soil health in orchard systems. Island Harvest is a 700-acre, family owned and operated, certified-organic macadamia nut orchard in North Kohala with a mission to "steward Kohala's agricultural lands, promote the well-being of the community, and provide quality food through organic and natural farming of macadamia nuts." Their belief and dedication to this mission was apparent through the effort they put into making the workshop a success!

15 attendees heard from speakers including Dr. Koon Hui Wang from CTAHR, NRCS Soil Scientist Amy Koch, Conservation Planner Louise Martin, plus Andrew and Nathan Trump of Island Harvest. Island Harvest demonstrated the use of a root aerator, which they use to establish cover crops within their orchards for research trials. Workshop guests walked away with an increased understanding of the importance of soil health, how to design cover cropping systems on their own operation, and the value of a soil health plan.

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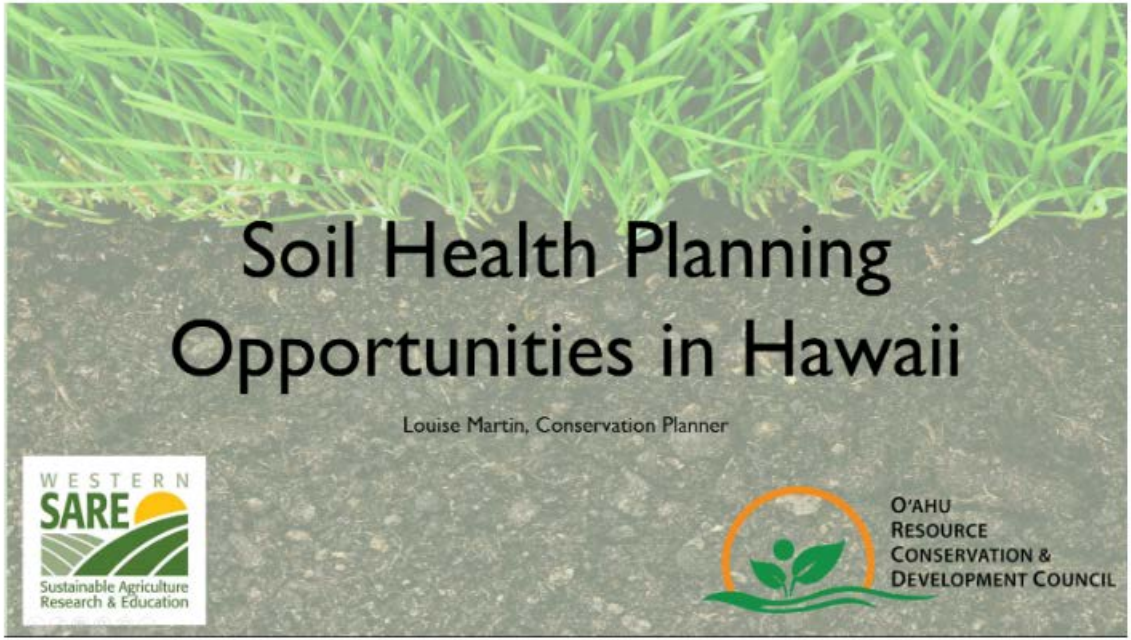
New Soil Health Resources!

Interested in building better soil on agricultural lands? Take a dive into ORC&D's Hawai'i Soil Health Resource Guide to learn how to get started!

This online resource provides information on soil health planning, Hawai'i's leading researchers and service providers in the field, different soil testing services, how to source compost, and other online tools and resources available for farmers aiming to build soil health!

Check it out here!



A Soil Health Management Plan is a tool for farmers that identify goals, resources, and opportunities to improve a soil's capacity to function - mapping out a strategy for soil health to contribute to the success of an agricultural operation. The plans build on an in-field soil health assessment and lab-based soil health indicators to inform a farm's soil health management and to serve as a measuring stick to monitor improvements and evaluate the plan's performance over time.

Find out more in this short, on-demand webinar, including how farmers on Hawai'i Island can participate in upcoming farmer-to-farmer soil health training events to complete a soil health management plan and how ag professionals can become eligible for certification