“What conditions are necessary to make agriculture economically feasible and sustainable on agricultural lands?”

Recurrent themes over the first 3 meetings

(note: the numbering convention used below does not reflect order or priority)

Government’s role

1. It is not Government’s role to identify specific crops for farmers to grow. Public sector has to stay away from the crop prediction game and the “we know what’s best” attitude.
2. Need to talk about agriculture in the whole – inclusive of sugar and pineapple that have stabilized (somewhat) and are the largest ag resource users, income generators, and employers.
3. Governor and elected officials need to temper their expectations of agricultural development in Hawaii – refer to Pacific Business News editorial by George Mason (5/9/03) on economic diversification. Dramatic growth will not occur during the legislative interim.
4. Provide good data and information, readily accessible, with patient and energetic assistance to help farmers articulate their questions and assist in answering them.

5. It is important to generate interest in farming, train new farmers, upgrade skills of existing farmers in order to increase the functional demand for agricultural lands and bring some ease of mind to landowners. Tools include mentoring, business incubators, in-field experience, public-private scholarships. CTAHR/Community Colleges targeting and informing entrepreneurial types of added-value and food processing advantages.

6. Estimating the acreage of prime agricultural lands “needed for agriculture” have limited value. It would be like estimating the acreage of prime commercial-zoned land needed for specific commercial activities such as drive-in restaurants and pawnshops.

7. Export-oriented agricultural production creates additional demand for land that is for all practical purposes, impossible to reliably estimate, since potential export markets are virtually unlimited.

8. The Feasibility Group should work with existing laws, policies, and politics and not expect further public sector incentives. For instance, we need to come to understand the rationale for and then seek to change counties subdivision requirements (underground utilities, sidewalks, fire hydrants, curbs, 44’ wide streets, etc.).

9. Government land use planning and zoning needs to refocus policy when it comes to urban development – the question that needs to be asked is under what circumstances is urbanization of prime agricultural lands acceptable?

**Where does and doesn’t agriculture work**

1. Agriculture is feasible on former sugarcane land – examples include Ewa/Oahu; Hamakua/Hawaii coast small lot licenses; Kahuku/Oahu licenses near the hotel; mac nuts near Port Allen/Kauai and Wailuku/Maui, guava in Kilauea/Kauai; seed corn in Kekaha/Kauai; banana in Keeau/Hawaii; forestry in Hamakua/Hawaii; etc.

2. Molokai is example where a critical link is missing – off-island transportation - that limits perishable interisland exports.

3. Not every farmer has a desire for large-scale agriculture with every decision made with expansion in mind. Need to be aware of differences in business plans.

4. Perishable crop production does well on Oahu because the major market is here.

5. Agricultural businesses are no different from other business ventures, many fail – few make it.

6. Multiple income farm families are legitimate farm businesses.

**What are the attributes of a successful commercial-scale farmer in Hawaii?**

1. Not just a grower and seller

2. Business history/longevity are indicators of economic viability

3. Secure land tenure, “cheap” land cost, and water are important but not enough to ensure success – examples include Waialua and Hamakua sugar workers
4. Solid business acumen, rapidly adaptable to opportunities and constraints given their product mix, always knows where the bottom line and competition are.
5. A businessperson can become a successful farmer – knowledge of farming is not always a prerequisite to success.
7. Small farmers form cooperatives to get access to key resource, such as vacuum cooling plant.
8. Know how to use public resources of research and technology to their advantage.
9. “Coordinating entrepreneur” may be a good starting point for budding farmers getting their feet wet.
10. Need to get public and private sectors to talk about agriculture in a positive light – not be so quickly dismissive. Restaurants fail but no one says not to go into the business.
11. Need a third-party organization to support farm successorship – like the Kona coffee lessees.
12. Existence of good farm business people attracts new entrepreneurs (“I can do that” and “That looks promising”) and capital.
13. Agricultural businesses can be rejuvenated with entrepreneurial talent.

What are the attributes of a successful commercial-scale crop in Hawaii?

What are the lessons to be learned from farm failures?

1. A former sugarcane plantation worker does not a farmer make.
2. Economically feasible agricultural self-sufficiency would be very difficult to achieve given the high rate of farm failures.

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