



Economic benefits short in building on farm land

As the human population continues to grow, farming becomes increasingly important for human survival.

Despite steadily increasing needs for food production, land development pressures are irreversibly converting prime agricultural land into other forms of land use.

This leaves farmers with less-appropriate lands that are inefficient and less profitable for agricultural production. This type of development clearly exists in Hawaii on nearly every island in the state. Certainly, this trend is understandable, with Hawaii's economy so closely tied to tourism, housing and meeting military needs.

Development of agricultural land provides jobs, but mainly during the building phase. Economic progress in this form too often leads only to shortsighted gain. Once the construction is done, the jobs are done.

Agriculture-related jobs, on the other hand, provide sustainability in terms of direct and related jobs. The trickle-down effect is great, with agriculture contributing not only to the local market, but also to Hawaii food product development and to tourism by providing prod-

ucts of interest, green space and opportunities for ag-tourism activities.

Question: Why does the Ewa Plain home development proposal threaten the well-being of agriculture in Hawaii?

Answer: This development would cause the loss of some of the most prime remaining agricultural land on Oahu. Although other areas are zoned agricultural, the steep terrain makes it impossible for these lands to be used for most crops. As we lose prime farmland, we become more dependent on shipping and the effects of external factors on our food supply and good nutrition.

Q: Is there any way to decrease Hawaii's food vulnerability while improving the economy?

A: In addition to preserving prime agricultural land, it is increasingly important to maintain that land with farming techniques that incorporate sustainable agriculture. Researchers in the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources at the University of Hawaii at Manoa continue to develop crop-specific techniques that help preserve the quality of farmland and the surrounding environment.

Q: How can agricultural land

preservation be incorporated into land development plans?

A: Possibly the best solution is to start treating prime agricultural land as endangered habitat. If proposed development causes unavoidable losses of prime farmland, then some mitigation for use of that land should be required.

Q: What would mitigation for the loss of agricultural land entail?

A: Mitigation could require the developer to provide for the development of other agricultural lands that require restoration and resources like water systems to be brought into production. But, in reality, this could be extremely difficult and costly.

It is time to get really creative. To maintain or increase food production capacity in Hawaii, either prime land or creative alternatives are needed. Hawaii is ideal for designing apartments to be used for farming. This is a trend elsewhere. With appropriate year-round sun, building designs for proper water and drainage could make hydroponic apartment structures a reality and bring food to the consumer doorstep.

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