



Cloverleaf Dairy Operator Ed Boteilho

Producers, Consumers Need to Work with Legislators to Protect Isle Water

If he didn't fully appreciate the value of water before the Oct. 15, 2006, earthquake, Big Island dairy producer Ed Boteilho certainly does now.

The quake destroyed the Kohala Ditch, leaving him and fellow ag North Kohala producers without precious irrigation water. With high fuel costs and the expense of importing feed for his 650-cow Cloverleaf Dairy, Boteilho said the post-quake challenge was just trying to figure out how to survive.

"Water, *wai*, brings life to the land," he told participants at a conference on sustaining Hawaii agriculture sponsored by the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program Sept. 23-24 in Kona. "Knowing the importance of water, we need to work with our legislators to be sure we have it."



Dairyman Ed Boteilho

When the rain comes, said Boteilho, he sees it as manna from heaven, especially in what called the new era of drought in the islands.

Unfortunately, he said, water is not the priority it should be.

"We're not going to be eating houses or people, we're going to be eating food, so we need to make sure we have water."

Boteilho, who operates one of the last two dairies in Hawaii, urged greater emphasis on all of agriculture and educating Hawaii residents of its importance.

"The last letter in SARE stands for education, and that's what's been lacking in agriculture for the last 70 years," he said. "Schools are starting to teach our children about the land, but more needs to be done.

"We have to go back to the roots of the Hawaiian culture," he added. "They had it all, and we have to learn from them."

Boteilho also cited zoning as a critical element of sustaining Hawaii agriculture.

"We need to get back to the simple basics with our zoning laws – not for development but for producing farms that can be sustainable."

As he spoke in September, Boteilho anticipated that the \$5 million effort to restore the Kohala Ditch would reach completion. And while the two years without the ditch placed a burden on producers in North Kohala, Boteilho saw huge dividends beyond the flowing water.

"The biggest benefit from this was working together for the common good," he said, citing broad private and public support. "That's what we have to do if we are going to sustain our agriculture."