

A BRIEF HISTORY

West Oahu Soil & Water Conservation District

Soil and water health are critical in agriculture. Over-tilling, removal of stabilizing vegetation, drought, and high winds resulted in the dustbowl: a period of massive crop failure and environmental stress during a time of war and economic uncertainty. President Franklin D. Roosevelt established programs to restore land health and mitigate for future disasters. States were encouraged to develop self-governing, state supported conservation districts, SWCDs.



SCS

SCS develops conservation programs that aim to retain, improve, and successfully manage topsoil. Conservation Districts are established across the nation and over 1 billion acres are enrolled in new farming methods that support best management of land.



1950

January 4, 1950, West O'ahu Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) is formed to proactively address soil health and water conservation. Jurisdiction covers from West Loch in Pearl City to Turtle Bay. This large district supports most of Oahu's farmers.



1978

City and County of Honolulu's Revised Ordinances authorize permit exclusions for SWCD Cooperators who develop and implement conservation plans. This encourages best management of our shared resources and provides cost savings to farmers. More farmers start requesting District support.



2015

Hawaii's State Agriculture Land Use Baseline is released. O'ahu has nearly 1000 farms, 40,845 acres in active ranch and farm production, and nearly 10,000 acres in diversified agriculture – more than the rest of the state combined. The Governor sets a goal to double local food production by 2030. Access to water and land as well as proper use of these resources is a primary concern.

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* A.P. White "Conservation Milestones"



1930-35

1931 – Black Blizzards – Severe Dust Storms
1934 – The Dust Bowl – Drought and poor land practices result in erosion, poverty & famine.
1935: Congress passed Public Law 74-46, which declares "the wastage of soil and moisture resources on farm, grazing, and forest lands. . . is a menace to the national welfare," Secretary of Agriculture establishes the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) to support conservation practices.



1940s

1947 – Hawaii State Legislature authorizes Chapter 180 relating to the creation of Soil Conservation Districts. Districts are managed by the people through locally elected and appointed boards. There is no cost to the farmer other than changes in farming practices they desire to make.



1967

Hawaii State Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) is directed to provide the SWCDs with funding and administrative support. A position* is created to support implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs).
*Position was lost during the economic downturn.



2014

West O'ahu SWCD Directors address the shift in local agriculture from large centralized farms to small decentralized farms by fundraising to hire staff. West Oahu provides: conservation education & technical assistance, k-12 education, community outreach, and partnership development to strengthen agriculture.



TODAY



West Oahu SWCD advocates for best management practices to support soil and water health, which sustains our community and way of life in Hawaii. We proactively provide ranchers, farmers, land managers, and landowners with conservation technical assistance and education.