



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

APR 29 2014

The Honorable Neil Abercrombie  
Governor  
State of Hawaii  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Governor Abercrombie:

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed coordinated effort between the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the State of Hawaii to identify and advance projects that will drive economic growth, self-sufficiency, and innovation in rural Hawaii communities. I believe that this partnership will create new opportunities for farmers and ranchers in Hawaii, including Native Hawaiians, military veterans, and beginning farmers. The effort will also contribute to a broader mission we share to address the State's food security challenges and reduce its vulnerability to supply chain disruptions.

Additionally, the effort furthers the goals of the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, groups that make up a significant portion of the population of your State.

I know that you had a recent conversation with USDA's Deputy Secretary, Krysta Harden, about the partnership. Deputy Secretary Harden is a strong advocate for new farmers, including beginning, minority, and military veteran farmers. She informed you that I have asked our State Food and Agriculture Council (FAC), chaired by USDA's Farm Service Agency, State Executive Director, Ms. Diane Ley, to serve as the convener for this effort. Through the FAC, USDA will coordinate closely with the Hawaii Department of Agriculture and with your office. I understand that the State and USDA have already begun discussions and have identified a set of projects—including projects targeted to beginning and veteran farmer opportunities, local food system development, and greater energy self-sufficiency—that have the potential to move forward in the near term.

Together, each of our representatives to this effort will outline action steps to accelerate promising projects. This work will include identifying appropriate Federal, State and private resource opportunities and sources of technical assistance, drawing from USDA and State experts, university and philanthropic partners, industry, and the nonprofit sector. The group will also work to identify best practices and regulatory barriers and make recommendations for project advancement. It will track resulting outcomes in quarterly reports made available to USDA and State leadership.

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Around the United States, the farm population is aging. Yet I am encouraged as I watch new farmers from all walks of life enter the industry. Promising market developments, such as the rapid growth in consumer demand for locally-produced food products, are spurring investment in local infrastructure to connect farms and consumers, drawing more people into farming and supporting greater community food security in areas like Hawaii.

The challenges faced by your State in the areas of both food and energy security are undoubtedly significant, but this is a moment of great promise. I believe that Federal-State coordination around these important issues can make an immediate and lasting impact in Hawaii. I look forward to our work together.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary