Just a few years ago many were devastated and at a loss as we witnessed 150 years of agricultural tradition in sugar actually coming to an end here on the Big Island.

However, as the Harvest of Hope video shows, we have demonstrated across our state that, with a helping hand rather than a hand out, and working together we can build a bright future for agriculture.

RETA-H has shown that it can be done. To date, 18,000 acres of former sugar land are back in production and approximately 1,100 jobs have been created as a result of the RETA-H program.

I am proud and honored to be with you today and to have played a small role in this process.

It has not been easy, as the life of a farmer never is. It involves backbreaking labor, endless hours, fertile soil, and good weather. Your hard work and dedication to build a new life in agriculture for Hawaii has proven successful and makes my job easy.

Though we are here to plan for our future, I would also like to take a brief moment to reflect on a few individuals who are with us in spirit today, who in their own ways shaped Hawaii’s agricultural history, and who were visionaries for Hawaii’s agricultural future:
• Shigeru "Shige" Kansako, the "Mayor of Honomu;"
• Francis "Franny" Morgan, the patron of Hamakua Sugar Company; and
• Dr. Noel "Ned" Kefford, former Dean of the College of Tropical Agriculture.

The dedication of individuals like these gentlemen has prepared us for the current phase of development of Hawaii's agriculture, namely:

• a transition from plantations to more diversified farms;
• embracing new markets with true import substitution for Hawaii, and true export capability beyond our shores; and
• implementing agriculture in its broadest terms.

I hope we can use these next two days to renew old friendships and establish new alliances across all sectors of industry and government.

Our competition is not from local or inter-island rivalries, rather our challenge is to make our mark together in the global marketplace and economy.

Though the RETA-H program we saw on the video will be coming to an end soon, I remain committed to our successful assault on the global agricultural marketplace.

The planned $45 million state-of-the-art federal agriculture research center to be headquartered at UH-Hilo is an important step. This scientific facility is committed to partnering with industry to promote strong science, better farming practices, and superior products.

Over the past 8 years, more than $52 million has been invested in additional federal funds for research to improve Hawaii's crops, to develop new products, and to capture new markets. I am committed to continuing our federal investment in Hawaii agriculture.
• We need to keep in mind that though sugar is no longer king in Hawaii, agriculture continues to be a significant contributor to the state's economy, providing nearly $3 billion in annual sales and more than 40,000 jobs.

• Outside this room, many in the state probably do not know that diversified agriculture is a bright spot in our state's economy and is one of the very few sectors in the state experiencing economic growth. We need to let our neighbors know.

• In 1987, diversified crops surpassed sugar in farm value in Hawaii and never looked back. A decade later, diversified agriculture in Hawaii is worth over $300 million annually.

• An unobstructed view of Hawaii's future in agriculture includes improvement and enhancement in some well-known areas, and also envisioning some unconventional possibilities.

• More specifically:
  • We should continue to utilize Hawaii's attraction and enhance our fresh products for in-state consumption and export.

• Keys to progress in this area are:
  • maintaining our aging plantation infrastructure; and
  • developing acceptable quarantine treatment technologies.

• We also must capitalize on our geographical good fortune and environment which gives us the ability to produce and market unique, high-value products like:
  • new processed foods;
  • flowers;
  • forest products; and
  • herbal products and medicines
• Unconventional thinking also allows us to expand upon Hawaii agriculture as a service industry, providing benefits both at home and for worldwide export. Examples include:

  • seed propagation and testing;
  • agriculture biotechnology; and
  • agriculturally based remediation of hazardous wastes.

• Beyond the obvious benefits of economic generation and enhanced employment opportunities, agriculturally-related products and services contribute to the high quality of life desired by residents and visitors alike.

• Benefits include:

  • maintaining cultural values and a way of life for rural communities;
  • a cleaner, greener environment; and
  • activities that complement and promote tourism.

• Much of Hawaii’s attraction lies in its lush tropical environment and in the aloha spirit of its multi-cultural population. This is in large part due to Hawaii’s agricultural legacy—past, present and future.

• I am committed to this legacy and to our continued success.

• With our minds open to new ideas and technologies, we can direct our efforts towards the collective success of our agricultural future.

• Your competition is not here at home. You are sitting next to your colleagues not your competitors. Supporting each other will result in success and rewards for all.

• Working together we can enhance the legacy of our plantation history and its physical infrastructure for the benefit of diversified agriculture. Made in Hawaii. Grown in Hawaii for the world.