

Sample Agricultural Conservation Easements in Hawaii

Pu`u O Hoku Ranch

2,800 acres of East Molokai's Pu`u O Hoku Ranch will remain forever in open space and agriculture thanks to a conservation easement agreement between Maui Coastal Land Trust (MCLT) and ranch owner Lavinia Currier. The protected lands lie along the southeastern slope of the island, encompassing over 3 miles of shoreline, pasturelands and hillsides. Pu`u O Hoku Ranch will continue to own and work the land in an ecologically sensitive manner, continuing their efforts in organic farming and cattle ranching. Pu`u O Hoku Ranch encompasses 13,000 acres at Molokai's east end.

Pu`u O Hoku Ranch conveyed a similar easement with MCLT in 2006 to protect 87 coastal acres adjacent to Pohakupili Bay. To support MCLT's ongoing responsibilities to monitor the activities in the easement areas, the Ranch donated \$ 75,000 to the MCLT stewardship endowment fund.

Ulupalakua Ranch

Pardee Erdman, owner of the Ulupalakua Ranch, donated a conservation easement covering over 12,000 acres to the Maui Coastal Land Trust (MCLT), creating the state's largest conservation easement. Erdman was concerned for the future of the ranch after watching parts of the island become carved up by giant homes or exclusive subdivisions.

The property is located in the hills above the resort communities of Wailea and Makena and includes one of the state's few remaining dry forests. The dry forest in the ranch is home to rare sandalwood and other native trees. .

The Erdman family is giving up all rights to subdivide the property and develop homes on the land. They will be able to continue to use the land for agriculture and will reserve the right to build renewable energy projects. In return, the landowners will be entitled to tax benefits. Future owners also will have to abide by the terms of the conservation easement. The ranch is Maui's second largest cattle ranch, with about 6,000 acres of the property used primarily for cattle grazing and farming. The rest encompasses Auwahi, an entire ahupuaa, which is a traditional Hawaiian mountain-to-ocean farming and residential development.

The Erdman family has owned Ulupalakua Ranch since 1963, when it was purchased from the Baldwin family. The ranch runs 2,300 brood cows, most of which are sold to Maui Cattle Company. The company is owned by Ulupalakua and six other Hawaii ranches.

Kainalu Ranch

The Maui Coastal Land Trust (MCLT) purchased the development rights to 168 acres from Kainalu Ranch landowner Kip Dunbar, a third-generation rancher. Dunbar and future landowners retain the rights to use the land for agriculture. The \$2.3 million deal marks the first time state legacy land conservation funds have been used. It's also the first time federal farm land protection funds have been used in Hawaii.

The State Legacy Lands Program contributed \$1.1 million of the price. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm and Ranchland Protection Program chipped in the remaining \$1.2 million. The federal Farm and Ranchland Protection Program aims to preserve farmland for agriculture and keep farmers and ranchers in the agriculture business. The funds must go toward land that is privately owned, large enough to sustain agricultural production, accessible to markets, and has adequate infrastructure and agricultural support services.

Sunset Ranch

A Pupukea ranch is now permanently dedicated to ranching and agriculture, thanks to an agreement by the owner and North Shore Community Land Trust. Sunset Ranch, owned by Pietsch Properties LCC, voluntarily delivered a conservation easement to the land trust earlier this month to protect its 27-plus acres from development in perpetuity. Greg Pietsch, the grandson of original property purchaser Charles J. Pietsch Jr., said he intends to keep the land in the family and in productive rural use to conserve it and support sustainability efforts.

While this is the first conservation easement the trust will own and steward, it is one of many projects the trust has led or partnered in, such as the purchase and protection of Pupukea-Paumalu in 2007 and Waimea Valley in 2006. Easement partners include Hawaii Legacy Land Conservation Fund, the city's Clean Water and Natural Lands Fund and Natural Resources Conservation Service's Farm and Ranchland Protection Programs.

"I am encouraged to see the fund being used to protect agricultural and ranch lands, as well as natural areas and habitat," stated Laura Thielen, director of the DLNR, which administers the Hawaii Legacy Land Conservation Fund. "Agricultural and ranch land like Sunset Ranch is an important part of our heritage and the rural character that makes the North Shore a special place," she added.