As evidence of it growing influence, the USDA announced this morning that Hiki Ola will receive a grant of more than $200,000 to improve social equity in West Hawaii. For more information on this first-time grant program, please see the USDA press release at the following link: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/newsroom/releases/?cid=NRCSEPRD1868022> . The grant, spread over two years, will support Hiki Ola's work in assisting socially-disadvantaged Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander farmers gain access to federal technical and financial resources. The grant will expand the reach of Hiki Ola's program and fund the development of new and important partnerships.

[USDA grant background:](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/newsroom/releases/?cid=NRCSEPRD1868022)

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is investing $50 million in 118 partnerships to expand access to conservation assistance for climate-smart agriculture and forestry. The Equity Conservation Cooperative Agreements, administered by USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will fund two-year projects to expand the delivery of conservation assistance to farmers who are new to farming, low income, socially disadvantaged or military veterans. Projects will support USDA’s broader effort to address climate change and equitable access to programs.

“We are committed to equal opportunity for those we serve, and we are taking bold, historic action to advance equity and root out generations of systemic racism,” Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said. “These partnerships are another example of how we are helping ensure historically underserved producers can more fully access and participate in our programs and services. As we’ve said before: equity will be a vital part of our climate change work, as America’s farmers and rural communities are on the frontlines of climate change. Our work with producers and partners will invest in climate smart solutions that improve profitability and resilience, open new market opportunities, and build wealth that stays in rural communities.”

The program encourages new partnerships and the development of state and community conservation leadership for historically underserved producers, with projects focusing on one or more of the following key conservation priorities:

* Improving soil health and water quality;
* Providing habitat for at-risk wildlife;
* Improving natural resources and productivity on agricultural lands; and/or
* Building and strengthening local and regional food systems and markets.

Among the partnerships are the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund and McIntosh Sustainable Environment and Economic Development (SEED). The partnership with the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, expands the Regional Agro Forestry Center (RAFC) to include climate smart agriculture, participation in conservation easements, heirs property consultations, forest management plans and certifications, and youth employment placement for Alabama, Georgia, Texas, South Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Additionally, a Regional Community Forest Justice Initiative (RCFJI) will provide limited-resource forest landowners with conservation education, technical assistance and a climate smart vision for their land  
   
The McIntosh Sustainable Environment and Economic Development (SEED) will help historically underserved producers implement natural resources conservation and climate smart agricultural practices. They will work with producers to strengthen marketing skills, access new markets, and produce and sell cooperatively. Additionally, SEED will engage historically underserved youth in 24 climate-impacted and economically distressed counties in Georgia through outreach and education, providing access to NRCS technical assistance, certifications and youth internships.