State of Hawaii
Department of Agriculture

HDOA REVIEWING APPLICATIONS FOR COVID-19 EMERGENCY FARMER RELIEF PROGRAM

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HONOLULU – The Hawai`i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) is currently reviewing requests for assistance under the COVID-19 Emergency Farmer Relief Program which offers some financial assistance to qualified farmers, ranchers and producers who have experienced damage to their operations due to COVID-19.

The funds for the program, totaling $250,000, are being utilized from the State's barrel tax fund (Agriculture Development and Food Security Special Fund) which was made available through Gov. David Ige's March 4 emergency proclamation. Relief funds may be used to help utilize an oversupply of agricultural products resulting from the decreased demand due to closures of restaurants, schools and other businesses.

Applications were accepted until March 27, 2020 and 333 proposals were received, requesting a total of more than $1.2 million dollars. However, since the available program funding totaled about $250,000, proposals are being reviewed and prioritized for distribution.

Under the emergency program, eligible applicants including individual farming operations may receive a maximum of $2,000. Also, non-profit organizations, commodity groups, agricultural associations with 501(c)(3) status may apply for a maximum of $10,000 in relief funds. The review and award process is expected to be completed next week and funds are expected to be distributed later this month.

"The overwhelming number of requests is an indication on how this crisis is severely impacting Hawai`i's agricultural industries," said Gov. David Ige. "This COVID-19 situation makes us all more appreciative of our local food producers and acutely underscores why increasing our state's food security has been so very important."

“We all need to make sure that our farmers, ranchers and other food producing operations can survive through and eventually recover from this crisis,” said Phyllis Shimabukuro-Geiser, chairperson of the Hawai`i Board of Agriculture (HBOA). “We ask that Hawai`i consumers continue to support our local farmers and food producers through direct and indirect sales at farmers’ markets and community-supported agricultural efforts. Buy local, it matters.”

In addition to the state funds, the Ulupono Initiative is contributing $20,000 to specifically help Hawai`i’s hog farmers who now need to purchase feed due to the unavailability of food scraps from restaurants that have closed. This contribution was made possible through a grant from the Ulupono Fund at the Hawai`i Community Foundation.

To provide further financial assistance to agricultural producers, HDOA’s Agricultural Loan Division will seek approval next week from the HBOA to establish an Emergency Agricultural Loan Program. Upon approval, agribusinesses may apply for low-interest emergency loans, which waives some of the normal requirements for ag loans. In addition, farmers with existing agricultural loans may contact HDOA’s loan officers to work out a payment relief plan. When approved, information on the Emergency Agricultural Loan Program will be posted at: http://hdoa.hawaii.gov/agl/

The department is also considering deferring rent payments for lessees currently in the state’s agricultural land programs.

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The Governor’s news conference regarding the COVID-19 Emergency Farmer Relief Fund may be viewed at the Honolulu Star-Advertiser website at: https://www.staradvertiser.com/2020/04/10/breaking-news/hawaii-records-2-more-covid-19-deaths-as-confirmed-cases-rise-to-464/