



Pacific Islands Area

Current Developments Summer 2007

Highlights from the Hawaii Association of Conservation Districts Annual Conference



(L-R) Taro Farm Tour; Margaret Becka, Mauna Kea SWCD and Skip Cowell, Kona SWCD/HACD President; Maggie Kramp, Maui SWCDs with Mayor Charmaine Tavares; Dean Okimoto and Alan Takemoto of the Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation receive a gift of appreciation from Skip Cowell.

New HACD Officers

- President: Kenneth Kaneshiro
- Treasurer: Lesley Hill
- Secretary: Wes Nohara
- HACD/HI Island Vice President: Lesley Hill
- Kauai Island Vice President: Ted Inouye
- Maui Island Vice President: JoLoyce Kaia
- Molokai-Lanai Island Vice President: Paul Elia
- Oahu Island Vice President: Rick Towill

The Hawaii Association of Conservation District's (HACD) Annual Meeting was held from Wednesday, June 13 - Friday, June 15, 2007 at the Maui Beach Hotel located in Kahului, Maui. Approximately 100 people participated in the HACD Annual Conference.

The displays in the background show cased projects from all islands for invited guests (state, county, and federal agents and politicians) to see what the districts have done.

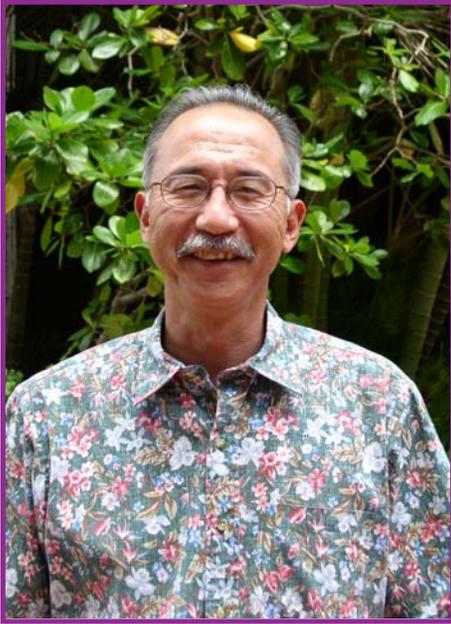
The first day session included Department of Health's Polluted Runoff Control Program, Office of State Planning Ocean Resources Management Plan, and Hawaii Coastal Zone Management Program. During the banquet, Skip Cowell recognized the Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation for their support in HB399.

The second day was a field trip that featured Tri-Isle RC&D Maui Ag Development Projects which were Makawao Mushrooms and No'Hoana Farm. A holistic management field demonstration was also conducted by Kirk Gadzia.

After the ag tour and dinner, a silent auction was held. The money raised from the silent auction will be used towards the Conservation Awareness Program. The third day was HACD's general session. It concluded with the election of new officers.

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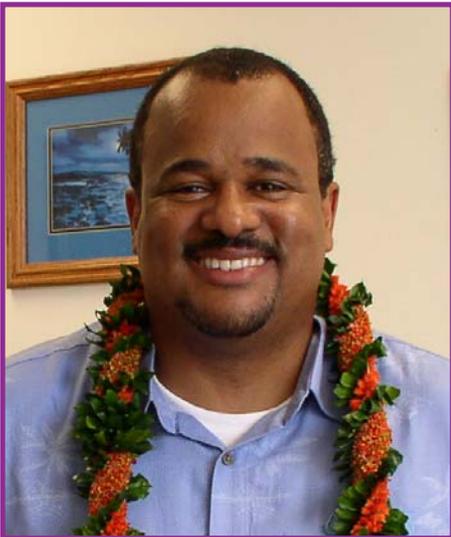


Lawrence Yamamoto

Message From the Director of the Pacific Islands

The month of September of 2007 saw me on temporary detail in our national office as the Acting Associate Deputy Chief for Programs. It was a tremendous experience for me and really helped me appreciate the great work we do as an agency. I found it especially interesting to represent Deputy Chief Tom Christensen at opening of the CSP training in Indianapolis, Indiana. There I was asked to welcome about 400 NRCS employees to the training session and to do so wearing a suit was no less a unique experience.

But the most interesting part of the work was being part of the decision making process that goes on every day in our headquarters. Much like making sausage, the process takes many kinds of raw materials and produces something totally different. The sum of the parts always looked very different from what we started with. Also being so close to the US Congress and the Secretary of Agriculture meant that events occurred quickly and often. For example, I was there when Secretary Johanns resigned and Acting Secretary Chuck Conner was named as his replacement. Taken as a whole it was definitely exciting and taught me a lot about our agency in the big picture and how we benefit our nation. I recommend that all of you consider either working in our national office or going on a detail there. It can be a great experience for you too.



Carlos Suarez

Message From the Acting Director of the Pacific Islands

Aloha! It brings a great sense of honor to have been serving as your acting director for the Pacific Islands Area. Since day one of my six-weeks detail, I felt the sense of family atmosphere, professionalism and dedication that all PIA employees bring to work every day. As a native of the island of Puerto Rico, visiting most of the islands in Hawaii brought me great memories of tropical agriculture.

You should be proud of your accomplishments! With one exception (which was beyond our control) we surpassed all our performance goals for FY07. This is a testament of your dedication, professionalism and true care for the land.

In my visit to the field offices, I experienced a great sense of achievement and pride for the work we do. I was able to go out to the field and see the successes of our PIA staff in implementing conservation on the ground. Although my time here in Hawaii did not allow me to spend time in the Pacific basin, I experienced the same sense of pride and accomplishments in conversations with district conservationist and field office staff.

In a few days, I will be returning back to my old job in California. As I reflect on what I have learned from this experience, one thought comes to mind and that is how friendly and conservation oriented our PIA employees are and how honor I am to have been called a member of this great NRCS-PIA family! Keep up the great work!

Mahalo,
Carlos Suarez

Current Developments is a quarterly newsletter for employees and partners.

Send articles and photos to:

Jolene Lau, State PAS
USDA NRCS
P.O. Box 50004
Honolulu, HI 96850

Dignitary Tours

Congresswoman Mazie Hirono

On August 24th, NRCS staff on Molokai met with Congresswoman Mazie Hirono at the Plant Materials Center (PMC) in Hoolehua. Since this was Representative Hirono's first visit to a PMC, we provided a quick overview of our program, objectives and activities, highlighting our support of the Kahoolawe Island Reserve Commission (KIRC)'s Kahoolawe island re-vegetation efforts. The visit concluded with a tour of the NRCS facility and poster presentation by PMC staff. Front Row (Left to Right): Kristen Cuelho, Representative Mazie Hirono, Shirley Nakamura, Annette Pauole – Ahakuelo, and Kawika Duvauchelle. Back Row (Left to Right): Jeff Knutson, Andres Juario, and Glenn Sakamoto.



Ambassador Suzanne Hale

On August 27th, the Ambassador of the Federated States of Micronesia, Suzanne Hale met with Lawrence Yamamoto, Director of the Pacific Islands Area in Honolulu.



Special Assistant to the Under Secretary Yenie Tran

On August 27th, special assistant to Under Secretary Mark Rey, Yenie Tran met with Lawrence Yamamoto, Director of the Pacific Islands Area in Honolulu.



Employee Spotlight



*Eileen Winkle,
Human Resources Manager*

Eileen Winkle provides outstanding Human Resources support and guidance with a positive and reassuring voice. All employees share consistently high praise about Eileen's professionalism, expert knowledge of HR processes, and cheerfulness under extremely demanding work load. Eileen provides clear and well documented support all the time. The move to develop a Pacific Islands detail announcement notice is a significant example of a new process to support all staff. This process will yield immeasurable long-term benefits for the Pacific Islands. Finally, few other HR staff in the nation have had to deal with the complexity of work load that she and her team have had to manage over the past year. In addition to the "normal" NRCS hiring processes with all the State Office position management tasks, Eileen and the HR team have effectively, and in a short time, worked to understand the Byzantine processes for the hiring and relocation of NRCS staff in the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau.

Thank you Eileen!

Civil Rights Update

by Civil Rights Advisory Committee

The PIA Civil Rights Advisory Committee (CRAC) appreciates the importance of ensuring that everyone in NRCS PIA is afforded equal opportunity with regards to programs and employment. To that end, the committee met recently to discuss important matters that may impact you and your future endeavors in the Pacific Islands Area (PIA). The committee Special Emphasis Program Managers (SEPMs): Athena Pratt (American Indian Emphasis Program), Katina Hanson (Federal Woman's Program), Cheryl Morton (Asian American/Pacific Islander), Sherman L. White (Black Emphasis Program), Michael Hashimoto (Disability Emphasis Program), and Kurencio B. Ngowakl (Civil Rights Chairperson) convened Monday and Tuesday, July 23rd & 24th, 2007, to hold their first annual face-to-face meeting as PIA CRAC. Also present during portions of the meeting were Eileen Winkle (HR representative), Keith Harada (Civil Rights Advisor), Jolene Lau (PAS representative), and Milton Martinez (Hispanic Emphasis Program) who gave his out brief prior to heading to Florida. Sam D.R. Taylor (Veterans Emphasis Program) was not present due to active duty military commitment. Please get to know your CRAC committee, your voice matters in issues pertaining to the Equal Opportunity Program. Although "the committee does not receive, investigate, and/or in any way adjudicate individual or class complaints of discrimination," members of the committee can certainly point you in the right direction for personal assistance. We are interested and welcome ideas on recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce.

One of the agenda items discussed was the mentoring program. Who of us knows what is required in climbing the career ladder and the appropriate steps to take at the proper time? These are but a few of the barriers that the mentoring program effectively addresses. How so? Through a mentor/mentee relationship, a qualified person/mentor provides proper guidance, direction and helps take advantage of networking in assisting new or current employees achieve their career goals within the agency. Thus, the mentee's productivity and potential for higher-level jobs is met. This should help in retention and recruitment of employees in PIA. The mentoring program provides an opportunity for personal and professional growth, increases staff morale and job satisfaction. Please, take advantage of the mentoring program. Another important topic for discussion given attention was the awards program. The awards program is a managerial tool that should be used to reinforce employees who do outstanding work. Supervisors, take the time to understand and utilize the awards program as a positive reinforcement tool for superior work that warrants it. Fellow employees, why not prepare yourselves for this award by working hard and maintaining a good work ethic, or request an award for one of your coworkers who have done an outstanding job. Even if you do not get noticed for your hard work behind the scenes, may the knowledge that you contributed to getting conservation on the ground be reward enough! Remember, the CRAC Committee is really your voice. If you want your voice heard, please contact us directly or visit the PIA CRAC website at: <http://www.hi.nrcs.usda.gov/about/civilrights.html>.

Focus on the Field

by Michael Whitt, State Office Resource Conservationist

Carlos Tantog is proving that both his farming operation and Threatened and Endangered (T&E) birds can co-exist on the same piece of ground. Carlos first started working in the hasu ponds as a young boy on his father's farm in Haleiwa. He continues to grow hasu to this day on that very same farm that his father passed on to him. Likewise, the *Gallinula chloropus sandvicensis*, or Hawaiian moorhen, have been nesting, feeding, and raising young in the hasu ponds for just as many years. Other T&E species also frequently use the ponds for feeding and loafing.

Carlos has been cooperating with US Fish and Wildlife for many years monitoring the birds on his property. He follows many of the recommendations provided by US Fish and Wildlife for enhancing his wetland farm and controlling predatory pests. Carlos has installed a fence to exclude and routinely sets traps for mongoose and cats. Nests are monitored to ensure that work in the ponds do not disturb the birds.

When you first arrive at the Tantog farm you are surprised to find their piece of paradise hidden among the town of Haleiwa. The Tantog farm is about 4.5 acres in size with 1.5 acres dedicated to hasu and moorhens. Other features to marvel at include an irrigation channel teaming with koi and tilapia (the fish are penned in using a tightly woven wire fence), fruit trees, and a few goats. The farm is truly enjoyed by all family members. Harolyn (Carlos's wife) is an avid bird watcher who routinely takes pictures of the moorhens which helps to monitor their progress. Harolyn also helps to grow the hasu by planting, weeding, washing, and finally boxing for sale. Mr. and Mrs. Tantog's children and grandchildren also reside on the farm and regularly pitch in to help harvest.

The NRCS was first approached by Carlos when he was ready to increase his production of hasu and was informed by US Fish and Wildlife that Federal assistance may be available. Carlos applied for the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program and was fortunate enough to receive funding. The project is currently underway and much of the work has been completed. Practices that the NRCS is providing assistance for include wetland enhancement, pest management and conservation cover. The goal of the project is to transform an area that is dominated by California grass into an area that can be utilized by both Carlos for hasu production and the moorhens for habitat.

This project is a perfect example of how WHIP funds can be used to transform a solid patch of California grass into an area that can be beneficial for both man and T&E species. Carlos takes pride in his farm which is evident by the farms tidy appearance. He also takes pride in the fact that the moorhens have chosen his farm as a place to live.



Top to Bottom: Carlos and Harolyn Tantog.

Hasu crop with a sign to protect moorhen.

Two moorhens by the irrigation channel.



Outreach Activities Held



On June 29 & 30th, the Hawaii Island Chamber of Commerce held their Annual Ag Expo in Hilo. The expo provided information for Hawaii's expanding diversified agricultural sector.

Pictured at left is *Matt Wung*, who staffed the NRCS booth and provided agency information to conference attendees.



On August 4, NRCS partnered with other agencies to hold an informational meeting for South East Asian farmers. Thank you to Aloun Farms in Ewa Beach, HI for hosting the event. A translator was present to relay the messages.

Pictured at left is *Jason Shitanishi* from the Farm Service Agency, who was among several representatives that shared information.



On August 22, a small group of junior and senior high school students from the Hawaii Center for the Deaf and Blind came by the Hawaii State Office to learn about our agency and the types of careers we have. *Karl Mikasa* and an interpreter led the tour. Several employees shared briefly what they do, the education required, and how they heard about our agency.

Pictured at left is *Dennis Kimberlin*, who shared his message through a sign language interpreter.

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Personnel Update

Incoming:

David Clausnitzer, Ecologist, Kamuela, HI
Charity Dudoit, Student Trainee Soil Conservationist
Jacqueline Flores, Area Resource Conservationist, Mongmong, GU
Keith Harada, Assistant Director for Administration, Honolulu, HI
Justin Perry, Soil Conservationist, Hilo, HI
Leo Smock-Randall, Soil Conservationist, Wailuku, HI
Sarah Tanuvasa, Soil Conservationist, Pago Pago, AS
Andrea Thompson, Soil Conservationist Aid, Wailuku, HI
Patra Vidondo, Soil Conservationist, Kealahou, HI
Mike Whitt, Resource Conservationist, Honolulu, HI

Outgoing:

Carl Coon, IT Specialist, Honolulu, HI
James Eller, Soil Conservationist, Kealahou, HI
Katina Hanson, Resource Conservationist, Honolulu, HI
Jeff Knutson, District Conservationist, Hoolehua, HI
Milton Martinez, Acting Asst. Director for Soil Science, Honolulu, HI
Kent Matsutani, Assistant Director for Programs, Honolulu, HI

Coral Reef Conference Held

An International Conference was held for Coral Reef Conservation in American Samoa during August 2007. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service teamed up with other Department of Interior Bureaus, the American Samoa Department of Commerce, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and other federal and Territorial agencies to provide valuable information to organizations and individuals working in coral reef conservation. Sessions included an overall review and summary of applicable federal funding opportunities, law enforcement and sustainable funding for the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources, watershed management and capital improvement projects, building a marine laboratory, and capacity building and development for locally-based non-governmental organizations.

Picture Perfect Please

Attention all photo enthusiasts--we are starting a photo contest for NRCS employees in the Pacific Islands Area. Submit one JPEG or TIFF image to jolene.lau@hi.usda.gov in the following three categories: Conservation (wildlife, resource concern, or implementation of a practice), Cultural, or Scenic. The leadership team will make their selections based on appropriateness to the category, composition, creativity, and aesthetics. Award recipients will receive an NRCS logo item and we'll post the winning photos in every newsletter. Deadline for the Winter Issue is November 16, 2007. Good luck!



John "Bart" Lawrence presented Anton Tornito with a certificate for her five years of Federal Service.

Congratulations!

July 2007 marked an important milestone in

Antonette Tornito's NRCS career. Anton is the Technical Secretary for the Pacific Islands West.

"Ms. Anton" as she is affectionately known to all of us, was presented by Bart Lawrence, ASTC-West Operations with her Five Year certificate at a gathering of Area Office staff.

Anton is very proud of her Five Years of Service in the Government of the United States of America. She is an outstanding NRCS Pacific Islands employee, and she is the heart of our NRCS offices in the west! Good job Ms. Anton.

We appreciate all that you do!



Ken Kramer (L) and Angelo Villagomez (R) of the Marianas RC&D, Cinta Kaipat, Staff of the Joeten Kiyu Public Library on Saipan, and students pose in front of one of two “Protect Our Coral Reefs” banners donated to the library by the Marianas RC&D. The posters read, “What we do on the land can affect our marine environment.” They are also distributing the bumper stickers of the same design to the public.

RC&D Corner: Marianas

by Ken Kramer, Coordinator

- The 1st NFWF public meeting on June 1, 2007: 31 individuals participated in which presentations and discussions focused on marine conservation of megafauna, including sea turtles. In addition to the NFWF Saipan Coral Reef PIC, presentations were given by Joe Ruak of the Division of Fish & Wildlife and Kathy Yuknavage from the Coastal Resources Management Office
- The 2nd NFWF public meeting was on August 24, 2007: 34 individuals participated in the presentations on Marine Protected Areas. In addition to the NFWF Saipan Coral Reef PIC, presentations were given by Dr. Peter Houk of the Division of Environmental Quality and Greg Moretti of NOAA. Mr. Moretti’s presentation was filmed by the RC&D Coordinator and is available online.
- The NFWF Saipan Coral Reef PIC presented our project at the Micronesians in Island Conservation Retreat in Majuro, Marshall Islands, in June 2007.
- The NFWF Saipan Coral Reef PIC presented our project at the Environmental Forum, hosted by the Northern Marianas College, held on Tinian in June 2007.
- Beautify CNMI was awarded an EPA Environmental Award in 2006. All of the NFWF grant activities were Beautify CNMI activities and the NFWF Saipan Coral Reef PIC coordinated ALL volunteer participation in this coalition. The NFWF Saipan Coral Reef PIC also maintained the Beautify CNMI website, conducted all general meetings, and committee meetings dedicated to Restoration, the Micronesia Challenge, Coral Reef Mural Contest, and Turtle Conservation. The CNMI was the only non-state recognized with an award from EPA.
- Beautify CNMI was named in the newspaper, as the Saipan Tribune’s “2006 Person of the Year.” The NFWF Saipan Coral Reef PIC’s picture appeared on the front page for this story.
- In the first six months of this year, the number of volunteer hours for this project has exceeded last year’s total and now stands at 9,000 volunteer hours! Beautify CNMI!, the volunteer group, the MRC&DC Coordinator and the NFWF Saipan Coral Reef PIC assisted in establishing and maintaining, has been submitted to the USDA-NRCS for an award for Earth Team Volunteers for 2007.

Big Island Supports Pro Am

by Steve Skipper, RC&D Coordinator

The dawn broke through a grey and sodden sky on Saturday June 16th, but that did not deter a rabid volunteer crew from transforming the parking area at Hilo's Honoli'i Pali surfing area into a brightly colored spectacle of surfing competition. Youth and young adults from around the island converged on the site and staged a day of healthy competition and a true celebration of the great Hawaiian Cultural sport of surfing. Preparation for the event started months before as permits and insurance were acquired, T-shirts and posters printed, and contest donations were channeled through the BIRC&D non-profit corporation to help stage the event.

This was the 23rd annual Big Island Pro-Am and the second year of support from the Big Island RC&D Program and Council. Initially the event organizer was not sure how to handle monetary donations from those in support of the event when he was asked about nonprofit status and tax id so that donors could write off their contributions. When he heard about the Big Island RC&D an instant partnership was formed. Now much of the headache of fiscal management for the contest is handled by the RC&D Council, giving him time to do what he does best, run the contest.

The Big Island Pro-Am Surfing Trials provides young men and women in Hawaii County an opportunity to compete at both the local and elite level as top finishers are awarded not only with trophies and accolades but a round trip ticket and pre-paid entry into a North Shore of Oahu professional level surfing contest. The drug and alcohol free contest focuses on perpetuating the Hawaiian Cultural legacy of surfing and in teaching Big Island young people the ideals of good sportsmanship and healthy competition. This event has also allowed local athletes a unique opportunity to springboard into the ranks of paid professional surfing and to travel the world on the competitive circuit. One former participant in the Pro-Am is a rare and prestigious Hawaii Triple Crown of Surfing title holder.

Student Summer Highlights

by Whitney Haraguchi, Nebraska

by Morri-Ann Nagata, California



Helping to paint the shamrock with the O'Neill Men's Club.



Conducting Flow Test.



Inspecting soybeans.

Palomares Elementary School, situated alongside Palomares Creek in Alameda County's Castro Valley, implemented a Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) restoration project in 2002 that helped inspire and expand watershed improvements throughout the San Lorenzo Creek Watershed. The project was managed by the Alameda County Conservation Partnership (NRCS and the Alameda County Resource Conservation District), with additional funding provided by the Alameda County Public Works Agency.

The 2002 WHIP creek project restoration goals included streambank erosion control and stabilization, wildlife habitat enhancement, and providing opportunities for students and the community to learn about their creek and watershed through hands-on activities.

Since 2000, Palomares School has hosted an annual Watershed Festival, mainly funded by the Alameda Countywide Clean Water Program and supported by the Conservation Partnership. This year the event blossomed into a much larger Science Expo and Watershed Festival for nearby communities. The Expo offered learning opportunities to more than 800 students and 32 teachers and chaperones from schools located within the San Lorenzo Creek watershed, along with parents and neighbors. The event was regarded highly by teachers because it helped meet curriculum standards set forth by California's "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001."

Volunteers Make a World of Difference!



(Left to right) Sabra Kauka of the Garden Island RC&D Council was presented a certificate of appreciate by Laurie Ho, coordinator and Peter Kea, President.

Thank you to the 147 volunteers who contributed 3,521 hours through the Earth Team in fiscal year 2007!
We could not have done it without you!



Picture of winning team from Kamehameha School. From left to right: Ashlee Kalauli, Keahi Camara, Kayla McCarty, Joy Kailiuli, and Tom Chun (Advisor).

Conservation Contest Winners

by Buddy Perry, Hilo Soil Conservationist

The annual County of Hawaii Conservation Awareness Contest was held on October 11, 2007 at Louis Santiago's Ranch in Waiakea-Uka. The Waiakea Soil & Water Conservation District hosted the contest where land is judged by its physical features. Soil texture, permeability, soil depth, slope, erosion, wetness, rainfall, elevation, climate, and other factors determine the potential land use or the maximum capability of that land. Students ranging from age 14 to 18 prepare for this contest through classroom instruction, field practice, and studying different land/weather variables. They learn to recommend cultural, vegetative, and structural practices that aid in the conservation of our natural resources. Personnel from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Big Island Soil & Water Conservation Districts helped organize and coordinate the contest. The overall educational experience gained from this contest has allowed our younger generation of agriculturalists to understand proper stewardship of all land classes.

There were three schools that attended this year's contest totaling 38 students. The results are as follows:

1st Place: Kamehameha Hawaii Campus High School; Advisor: Thomas Chun; Team: Ashlee Kalauli, Greg (Keahi) Camara, Kayla McCarty, and Joy Kailiuli.

2nd Place: Pahoa High School; Advisor: Derek Inouye; Team: Megan Bruce, Kristel Madamba, Lea Bernaldo, and Jay Bumanglag.

3rd Place: Waiakea High School; Advisor: Terrance Moniz; Team: Kristie Kohashi, Mark Kaili Jr., Marvin Mihkel, and Ashton Sentiro.

Overall Top Scorers: 1st – Megan Bruce – Pahoa HS, 2nd – Ashlee Kalauli – Kamehameha School, 3rd – Greg (Keahi) Camara – Kamehameha School, and 4th – Kristi Kohashi – Waiakea HS.

The Kamehameha team will compete at the State contest which will be held on Molokai on October 27.