



PACIFIC ISLANDS AREA

PROFILES IN soil health



Aileen Yeh

Hilo, Hawaii

Operation : ranching

Practices: prescribed grazing

Local Rancher Digs Soil Health

On another beautiful day in Hawaii, Aileen Yeh will come out and dig around to see what's under the grass on her ranch. She'll turn over the cow pies to see what kind of soil organisms are flourishing to keep her soil healthy.

Making the Change

Ranching in Hawaii is challenging because the cost to do business means bringing in supplies and feed from the mainland. Aileen decided that she would apply fewer inputs on her ranch to ultimately save money on fertilizers and reduce the negative impacts of chemical use on her ranch.

"In one word, soil health is 'important' because that's what makes your grass and forage grow."

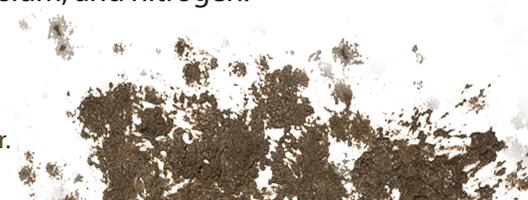
- Aileen Yeh, Hawaii Rancher

The Practices

Historically, Aileen's father managed the ranch that was founded by her grandfather. He applied lime, crushed coral, and planted legumes. Now, Aileen adds small amounts of fertilizer and calcium, as well as a variety of other legumes to help soil organisms do their part in maintaining healthy soil. Prior to implementing soil health practices, her ranch was typically low in phosphorous, potassium, and nitrogen.



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Healthy Results

Aileen noticed a difference in soil health after implementing these new practices. For example, now she allows the pastures to rest so her cows are just grazing enough to keep the grass at a reasonable height, taking half and leaving half. This helps tremendously to minimize erosion and improve soil health.

Customers are also pleased to know that Aileen has happy cows on her ranch. They are especially glad to know that Aileen does not use growth hormones or unnecessary antibiotics on her animals.

Contact

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Healthy organic matter with worms to help decompose material on the ranch.

When the average rancher or producer cannot afford to install conservation practices on their own, Aileen recommends that they see NRCS. "If it wasn't for NRCS, I don't think I would be where I'm at today," said Aileen Yeh. "It was because of all the help and encouragement from NRCS to enter into EQIP contracts for crossfencing, brush management, grass/legume planting, and pasture management. After following their recommendations and seeing the changes, I see the worth and the value of their programs. Now I'm at a point where soil health means the grass is growing without many inputs. The forage and legumes are self-sustaining with the microorganisms and everything is working together to make the grass grow healthy for the cows."



Prescribed grazing allows the grass and soil to rest.



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