

Drought eases, but farms and ranches still suffering

By Gregg K. Kakesako

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Last month's heavy rains eased drought conditions and Oahu and Kauai are no longer officially in a drought, the National Weather Service said.

But farmers and ranchers are still suffering, especially those on the Big Island where some ranchers are reportedly still hauling water to support their livestock.

National Weather Service hydrologist Kevin Kodama reported said "conditions on the leeward side of the Big Island, which is a dry area normally, improved slightly."

However, last month's rain fall "was not enough since it occurred over a short period of time" to eliminate the drought conditions there.

He said Kauai and Oahu recorded rainfall totals about 10 to 21 inches more than what normally falls during a month. Several record rainfall totals were recorded on Oahu, including 5.41 inches that fell at Honolulu Airport Dec. 20 breaking the old record of 5.28 inches set in 1955.

"Water levels in the Waimanalo reservoir increased considerably over the past month," Kodama added.

He said that because of the rise in the water supply the state department of agriculture eased water use restrictions," Kodama said, "going from a mandatory 30 percent cutback to a 20 percent cutback on Dec. 21."

He said Maui also experienced "above normal rainfall" last month with water levels in Molokai's Kualapuu reservoir also increasing "modestly," but not enough to warrant the easing of the 30 percent cutback in irrigation water consumption.

On Maui, Kodama said more rain is needed to improve

full recovery of pasture land in leeward Maui. He said Maui County Department of Water Supply continued to request a 5 percent reduction in water usage for upcountry Maui residents and a 10 percent reduction in water use remains in effect for central and south Maui residents.

Big Island papaya and longan or "dragon eye" farmer Delan "Rusty" Perry said farmers in the Big Island Kapoho area "were happy to get the rain, but now we would love to see the sun."

He said the south area of the Big Island, which averages about 7 inches a month received 6 to 9 inches of rain last month.

"For papaya and banana growers that means stepping up their fungus control," said Perry, who heads the Big Island Farm Federation,

Kodama noted that this year's normal wet season is being affected because of the La Nina conditions which replaced El Nino trends last summer. La Nina conditions, with cooler than normal surface sea temperatures near the equator, cause changes in the weather and bringing the possibility of more rain.

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