

Work toward renewable energy on Kaua'i detailed

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LĪHU'E, Kaua'i — On Kaua'i, thousands of acres of vacant sugar cane fields, year-round river flows and even an overstuffed county landfill full of methane gas should count as energy assets, a speaker at a renewable energy conference said.

Other assets include solar, wind and wave energy that are available to the Garden Island, said Maurice Kaya at the Kaua'i Renewable Energy Conference.

Kaya — an energy consultant and former chief technology officer for the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism — said his personal goal is to wean the state from oil entirely. Kaya was the opening speaker for the two-day meeting at the Kaua'i Marriott Resort & Beach Club that concluded yesterday.

For those who find his goal too lofty, he said plenty of experts agree that Hawai'i can get 20 percent of its energy needs from renewable sources by 2020.

"You and I both know that things are not happening fast enough," Kaya said to an audience of more than 250 Kaua'i residents. "Businesses are failing, consumers are complaining and confidence in government and other institutions is low. We need to let elected officials know your concerns and your expectations. It's time to act."

Kaya's speech captured the theme of many of the conference presentations, which came from

business, government and public utilities.

For example, in a panel session highlighting renewable projects under way or under consideration on Kaua'i, Randy Hee, president and CEO of the Kaua'i Island Utility Co-op, said KIUC is shooting to get half its power from renewable resources by 2023 — while increasing its electricity production by 45 percent.

Currently, the utility gets 6 percent to 8 percent of its energy from renewable sources.

KIUC plans to buy renewable-generated power from Green Energy Hawai'i LLC, which proposes to gasify waste wood chips, and from Gay & Robinson Inc., which intends to remake its sugar plantation into an energy company, Hee said.

Longer-range options for the utility include solar and wind power, the possibility of a county waste-to-energy plant, and the methane gas in the county landfill at Kekaha, he said.

Grove Farm, another of Kaua'i's biggest landowners, has two priority renewable energy projects, senior vice president Michael Tresler said.

The first is participating in Hawai'i Bio-Energy LLC, a cooperative venture with Kamehameha Schools and Maui Land & Pineapple Co. Inc., that is researching sugar cane, woody biomass, algae and other potential fuel crops.

Another Grove Farm plan is to build a "solar field" of photovoltaics to create 10 to 20 mega-

watts of power. The company also is testing solar-powered street lights and considering wind power options, Tresler said.

"Agriculture is the foundation of the new green economy," said Paul Zorner, a Hawai'i Biofuels renewable fuels researcher and "technology enthusiast" who calls a cane field "a solar and carbon dioxide collector."

Technology can help make agriculture lands more productive and sustainable, while improving conservation, Zorner said. The future will see integrated plantings for food, energy and biomaterials, he said.

The Navy, which operates the Pacific Missile Range Facility on Kaua'i's west side, is partnering with Kaua'i County on a project to get methane gas from its Kekaha Landfill and looking to get power from waste oil and from a molten carbonate fuel cell, Capt. Aaron Cudnohufsky said. Renovations of base housing also will include solar water heaters and photovoltaics.

Currently, the range has solar-powered street lights, airfield runway lights and research and development equipment.

"The single most important thing we can do in our state to strengthen the economy is to stop importing so much oil," state Sen. Gary Hooser, D-Kaua'i-Ni'i-hau, told the conference. Hawai'i spends \$5 billion to \$7 billion a year for fossil fuel, he said.

Hooser and state Rep. Hermi-na Morita, D-Kapa'a-Hanalei, worked to pass a bill that requires

all new houses built in Hawai'i after 2010 to have high-efficiency water heaters. Solar hot water heaters will save homes 25 percent in energy bills, "without

costing the state a dime," he said.

Yet, that bill took five years to pass, Hooser said. "We cannot afford five more years for the next step" toward Hawai'i's en-

ergy future, he said.

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