2005 VEGETABLE, MELON, AND TARO HIGHLIGHTS

VEGETABLES AND MELONS

The farm value of Hawaii's vegetables and melons is estimated at a record high $54.3 million in 2005, up fractionally from the previous record high set in 2004. Changes in farm prices were mixed, but a 1 percent increase in production ensured 2005's record revenues.

Although weather conditions were mixed in 2005, it was an improvement from 2004 when a very wet winter hampered vegetable production throughout the year. Reminiscent of 2004, most areas of the State experienced a wet start in 2005 as unstable weather conditions produced periods of heavy showers in January and February. The wet weather slowed crop progress and hampered farm activities, but unlike 2004, the 2005 rainy season was not as intense and was mainly concentrated in the eastern half of the State. Vegetable and melon growers then benefited from a mixture of mostly dry weather and a few periods of moderate to heavy showers for the remainder of the year. At year's end, December 2005 was so dry that the National Weather Service reported that the island of Kauai experienced record-setting dryness with all gauges reporting below normal totals and most at less than 10 percent of normal.

Hawaii's tomato farmers (field and greenhouse types) led all other vegetable and melon growers with $9.8 million in farm revenues or 18 percent of the overall total. Taking over second place were sweetpotatoes which posted $3.8 million in farm revenues during 2005, up 78 percent from 2004 on the strength of higher farm prices and production. Moving up to third in farm revenues were watermelons with $3.1 million, a 26 percent increase from 2004 due to higher farm prices and production. Dry onions, at $3.0 million, and cucumbers, with $2.8 million, rounded-out the top five revenue-producing vegetables and melons in 2005.

TARO

Hawaii taro production is estimated at 4.0 million pounds in 2005, down 19 percent from 2004 and the lowest total since the NASS, USDA, Hawaii Field Office began publishing taro estimates in 1946. The previous record low was 5.0 million pounds set in 2003.

Taro production was hindered from the start of 2005 by a second winter of rainy weather. Periodically heavy rains pelted the major taro growing areas throughout the first quarter and resulted in occasional flooding. While plant losses due to weather were light, the wet and cloudy weather did slow crop development. The rest of 2005 was generally a mixture of sunshine and showers which favored taro, but the plant's 11-15 month maturity cycle prevented the industry's recovery for 2005. Pests also continued to pose a problem for taro growers. Reports of apple snail (*Pomacea canaliculata*) infestations and losses varied from light to extremely heavy. Taro Pocket Rot (TPR), a disease that forms pockets of rotting tissue in the corm, also continued to result in some losses. Finally, incidences of leaf blight *(Phytophthora colocasiase)* caused by the wet weather, slowed crop development.