



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 13, 2020

20-003

Hawai'i Department of Health ends enforcement against Big Island Dairy in 'Ō'ōkala

HONOLULU – Big Island Dairy, LLC, a 2,500-acre dairy operation in 'Ō'ōkala on the Hamakua Coast on northeast side of Hawai'i Island, has met all of the Hawai'i Department of Health's (DOH) enforcement actions to address the dairy's water pollution act violations that began two years ago, according to Keith Kawaoka, the health department's deputy director of environmental health.

The dairy, which is no longer in operation, completed all of DOH's requirements in 2019:

- Stopped all milking and creamery operations;
- Eliminated its wastewater system;
- Removed all chemicals and fuels from the facility;
- Removed all of its dairy cows from confinement and reduced its herd to nearly zero; and
- Paid \$87,000 to the Center for Food Safety to complete environmentally beneficial projects that will benefit the people of Oookala who were most impacted by the violations. The Center for Food Safety represented the local citizens group that filed a federal lawsuit against the dairy owners for Clean Water Act violations, will implement a series of projects, including upgrades to the local drinking water system, sampling and disinfection of soil contaminated by excess manure runoff and upgrades and maintenance to local storm water infrastructure.

“The Department of Health remains a strong supporter of local agriculture and food security but must ensure that agricultural businesses are conducted in an environmentally responsible, sustainable manner,” Kawaoka said. “It’s disappointing that Big Island Dairy was unable to fill the need for local milk and milk products, while also meeting all federal and state environmental regulations to protect local communities and our delicate ecosystems.”

Background

Beginning in 2014, the Department of Health's Clean Water Branch received complaints about the dairy's wastewater discharges into nearby streams that run through the town of

‘Ō‘ōkala. In March of 2017, DOH confirmed that the dairy was discharging wastewater and initiated the first of two formal enforcement actions, ordering the dairy to cease its discharges of wastewater, seek a DOH-issued pollutant discharge system (NPDES) permit, and make corrective actions to prevent additional violations.

After issuing the 2017 enforcement action, the dairy repeatedly experienced incidents that led to additional discharges of millions of gallons wastewater and contaminated stormwater from its wastewater systems.

In 2019, DOH issued an Administrative Order on Consent, which required the dairy owners to ultimately cease discharging wastewater, pay either a monetary penalty or support a DOH-approved environmentally beneficial project. Due to factors associated with its operation, owners of the dairy decided to close its business and seek the sale of its assets in late 2019.

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