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Interview with Richard Ha

By Henry Curtis

Richard Ha owns Hamakua Springs Country Farms, served as Board Chairman of Ku`oko`a Inc., the entity which sought to buy the HECO Companies, a member of the business-based Big Island Community Coalition (BICC) which seeks lower electric rates, and a partner in the Hawaii Island Energy Cooperative (HIEC) which was granted party status in the Public Utilities Commission's HECO-NextEra's Merger proceeding. HIEC is represented in the docket by three McCorrison Miller Mukai MacKinnon LLP attorneys: David Minkin, Brian Hirai and Peter Hamasaki.

Who were your influences?

My dad was most influential when I was 10 years old. He said stuff like; get thousand reasons why no can, I looking for the one reason why can; look for two answer for every problem and one more just in case.

In Vietnam, the unspoken rule was—we all come back or nobody comes back. And, more recently a few folks I got to know from attending five Association for the Study of Peak Oil (ASPO) conferences.

What are your values?

In the uncertain future that we face, we must find solutions that take care of all of us, not just a few of us.

Where did you grow up?

At the end of Alaloe Rd in Waiakea Uka Camp 6, a few miles upslope of Hilo. Gravel road which we ran on barefoot until we had to wear shoes to go to 7th grade. Went to Waiakea Uka elementary school which closed after my sixth grade year.

What do you do to unwind, to recharge yourself?

I used to do competitive power lifting for many years. Am going back to the gym, not to compete but for fun. Other than that I like to travel. I like to use new technological innovations for the farm—We have an unmanned aerial vehicle to do mapping, etc. on the farm. I like to operate the bulldozer to clean out the invasive species on the farm and make the streams more accessible. I like to do the maintenance of our flume which supplies water to our hydro generator.

What does your partner do?

She manages the office for the family farm. If it wasn't for her, we would not have a farm and I could not do what I do. She keeps me grounded.

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How did you get involved in agriculture?

Pop asked me if I would like to manage the family poultry operation when I graduated from UH Manoa with an accounting degree.

How did you get involved in the energy field?

Noticing that our farm operating costs were rising starting around 2005, I soon realized that it was due to the influence of rising primary products and by products of petroleum oil and gas. I went to the first of five Association for the Study of Peak Oil (ASPO) conferences.

What energy questions are you interested in exploring?

What combination of energy solutions can result in taking care of all of us, not just a few of us. Knowing that 2/3ds of our economy consists of consumer spending, how can we achieve lowest cost? That will give folks on the lower rungs of the economic ladder discretionary income—again 2/3ds of the economy is made up of consumer spending. Trickle up economics benefit everyone. The more fortunate will need to tax themselves less to take care of the less fortunate.

I believe that in order for the solution to be sustainable, it needs to be socially, economically as well as environmentally sustainable. I try to pay close attention to the socially sustainable—hence my use of the term “rubbah slippah folks” and “its about all of us-not just a few of us”.

Are you excited about the future?

Yes, I think that we can find solutions that will give us a competitive advantage to the rest of the world. There will be winners and losers. We don't have to be losers.

Why a co-op?

It's about all of us not just a few of us. Each member has one vote. It is run by a board of directors elected by its members. Excess revenues are returned to the members in proportion to their usage.

We are not alone. We will be part of a network of 900 member electricity co-ops in the nation. The association of co-ops exist to help their members. The association of co-ops own a finance company—National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC) that have assets of \$26 billion and it is a non-profit so pays no taxes. And, with 900 member co-ops, the technical expertise that a member can call on is exponentially greater than a stand-alone co-op alone in the middle of the Pacific.

In the 12 years of its existence, the KIUC is the only Hawai`i utility who has seen its costs decline.