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Rising rent worries Hawaii Kai farmers

A rally appeals to Kamehameha Schools for reasonable rates

By Richard Borreca

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A dozen farmers on 87 acres of leased land in the back of Hawaii Kai fear they will soon be displaced by soaring lease rents from Kamehameha Schools.



CINDY ELLEN RUSSELL / CRUSSELL@STARBULLETIN.COM
R and S Nii Nursery owner Richard Nii discussed bougainvillea with Karen Azama yesterday during the first Farm Day in Kamilonui Valley.

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To call attention to their situation, the farmers and political leaders staged a rally yesterday in the undeveloped Kamilonui Valley.

Tom Yamabe, 87, a founder of the Hawaii Farm Bureau who operates a small farm in the valley, says the farmers worry that if Kamehameha increases their rents too much the farmers will be priced out of the market.

"Some of them don't make \$2,000 a month -- how can they pay a big increase?" Yamabe said.

Gov. Linda Lingle and Sandra Kunimoto, state agriculture department director, attended the rally, although Lingle only said she hoped that Kamehameha would consider the farmers.

"I think Kamehameha is very sensitive to this issue," Lingle said.

State Senate President Colleen Hanabusa, who also attended the rally said the state's laws protecting important agriculture offer tax credits to large owners to dedicate the property to agriculture.

"Clearly this is an amazing oasis in the midst of an urban development," Hanabusa said.

Kekoa Paulsen, Kamehameha spokesperson, said the large property owner plans to keep the area in agriculture "at least through 2025."

Kamehameha plans to open discussions with the farmers at the beginning of the year, Paulsen said, noting that the lease rents have not been raised in 35 years.

"We expect them (lease rents) to go up. ... We have six months with the farmers to work with them to reach an agreement," Paulsen said.



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tours of the farms, was designed to "create an awareness of this issue."

"We have a petition for people to sign to ask Kamehameha to keep the lease rents reasonable," Ward said.

Neither Kamehameha nor the farmers would give the price of the current lease rents.



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