

# THE STATUS OF VETIVER



**V**etiver, *Vetiveria zizanioides*, has been on Saipan for nearly ten years now. The vetiver on Saipan is the ideal grass for soil conservation. It is a variety known as “Louisiana Sunshine,” which was extensively tested by NRCS. One of the reasons this plant is so good for conservation is



that it does not have fertile seed; it requires human intervention to manually pull apart the slips and plant them. This is so important because there is no chance it could ever become invasive or a pest.

Vetiver is gaining popularity on Saipan. People are beginning to see its potential as a conservation tool to fight soil erosion on cropland; as a soil bioengineering, environmentally friendly alternative for bank stabilization for bridges and culverts (See photo of the Beach Path project); and as a living, dynamic, and superior silt fence on construction sites. The Northern Marianas College has been growing it for years. Vetiver has been used on many government projects including Obyan Beach, Youth Detention Facility, and the Beach Pathway. Nurseries are beginning to carry vetiver as more projects and engineering firms recognize its value.

The list of farmers on Saipan planting vetiver is growing. They are learning that when planted along the contours of the land, vetiver conserves soil moisture, and improves crop yields. It serves as an infield windbreak to further diminish the water requirements of the crop by deflecting the wind and reducing the evapo-transpiration of the desired crop's leaves. It also, by virtue of its dense, stiff growth, has the

potential to assist in pest management by funneling rodents away from crops and towards a trap or poison to eliminate the pest. This same characteristic growth of vetiver traps sediment and allows water to pass through it, making it a must for soil conservation. Finally, its leaves are superior for mulch.

Farmers can apply for the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** and receive cost share money (\$) to plant Vetiver Vegetative Barriers on their cropland. While signup is continuous, the current **deadline for EQIP signup is February 16<sup>th</sup>** for the 2<sup>nd</sup> signup period.

For more information: contact the Saipan and Northern Islands Soil and Water Conservation District at 256-7923 (SWCD) or USDA/Natural Resources Conservation Service at 236-0888, Fax: 236-0889.

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