

Molokai Ranch chief optimistic

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By Edwin Tanji

Advertiser Maui County Bureau

KALUAKOI, Molokai — Molokai Ranch President Randolph Moore said yesterday he is "cautiously optimistic" about the ranch's future, adding pointedly, "We think we will prosper as the island prospers."

He said there is a potential for prosperity in agricultural operations. For the future of agriculture on Molokai, Moore said, "the biggest threat" is the possibility of the closing of Oahu's last two sugar plantations.

They each have roughly 12,000 prime acres, on which they can grow anything being grown on Molokai, with water and without the cost of shipping, Moore said.

Moore was among speakers at a Molokai Economic Development Conference that focused on agriculture and tourism on the economically troubled island. The 100 Molokai business leaders attending the session heard a mixed forecast on agriculture.

Molokai developer loses hotel financing because of potential red tape. See Page B-7.

Ken Kawakami of the Del Monte pineapple operation said, "We're not sure where we're headed next year." Del Monte did not replant this year and still hasn't decided whether to replant next year, he said.

Del Monte has a lease on 2,500 acres of Molokai Ranch land, but can give up that lease in 1990 if it gives the ranch two years notice. The company has only 1,000 acres in production now and is having problems dealing with fruit from Molokai because of the extra handling that is required, Kawakami said.

But the forecast for diversified agriculture is positive, according to Molokai Farm Bureau President Dan Kuhn. He noted that Molokai leads the state in producing watermelon, sweet potatoes, bell peppers and green beans.

It's a center for seed corn research, and

farmers also are growing foliage for export to the Mainland, alfalfa, hay, onions, tomatoes, cucumbers, ginger, herbs, banana and papaya. Farm income on Molokai last year amounted to between \$13 million and \$15 million, Kuhn said.

But there are problems, the main one being transportation, he said. Produce must be loaded on barges at Kaunakakai wharf by crane, and even when the barges arrive in Honolulu, the produce can be stuck on the barges for hours waiting to be unloaded.

"If you look at our facilities, you'll see we're still in the past century," he said.

Some Oahu truckers and wholesalers will not bother with produce from Molokai because trucks going to pick up the produce at the Young Brothers pier can waste an entire day, he said.

Mayor Hannibal Tavares said he is aware of these transportation problems and said one possibility is for the farmers to cooperatively own their own barge, rather than having to depend on Young Brothers.