Moloka'i Native Hawaiian Beginning Farmer Program

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On the island of Moloka'i, there are over 7,800 acres of agricultural land in Ho'olehua under the control of the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands, with agricultural lots of 5 to 50 acres leased to Hawaiian families for 99 years. There's also a state irrigation system in which Hawaiian homesteaders have prior rights to 2/3's of the water.

The purpose of this program is to train new farm families in the Ho'olehua Hawaiian homes area of Moloka'i in farm crop production and business management. In three years, three classes were trained, and each class was limited to eleven participants. This extension program targets food security and sustainability in Hawai'i, and also the need to address the aging farm population in the U.S. Hawai'i produces less than 15% of its food, and a major disruption in the food delivery system would be devastating to Hawai'i residents. The average age of the overall U.S. workforce is 38 years, while the average age of farmers is 58 years.

This program is open to Hawaiian Homesteaders on Moloka'i with access and control of agricultural land, and must have ready access to agricultural water. The program has a strong focus on the business aspects of farming, starting with the development of a production map that's market-driven, and outlining planting, harvesting and all activities in between. Record keeping includes utilizing a planner and a journal to record all activities related to the farm in order to better zero-in on costs, especially labor. Participants have access to the UH CTAHR Cooperative Extension Service computer lab, which is open from 8 am to 4 pm on weekdays.

Individual assistance is provided in the field and office. Project Directors serve as mentors and help participants walk through their plans, while participants from the previous class also assist as mentors. Access to mentors can be through individual consultation, email, telephone, and cell phone.

Class I participant John Freeman with his field of butternut squash – Ho'olehua

Weekly 1½ hour workshops are the backbone of the program that teaches farming business methods, and includes classroom instruction, field demonstrations, and farm tours. Other methods of program delivery include one-on-one assistance, computer-generated training, video, webinars, and reference sites.

Aligned with the business aspects of farming, the program teaches crop sciences, and also the art of farming.

Class II participant Tony Lauifi with his field of taro for leaf production - Kalamaula

While workshops provide broad subject matter, the program relies heavily on one-on-one assistance to develop a participant's business plans. Participants are expected to select a short-term crop that can be planted and harvested several times over a year, and delivered to a market they will develop. The production map developed by participants is their contract with the program, and gives them access to supplies and tractor services, and also resources and assistance to guide them through all aspects of production. The production map must be approved by project directors before implementing the project, and no changes can be made without prior approval.

The next step is implementation of the production map. A maximum of ½ acre will be planted as part of a demonstration project to provide experiential farm training. Windbreaks must be able to protect the mature crop by the time any crop is planted in the field. This program will also prepare an additional ½ acre field to give participants a kick-start to farming on their own when they complete this program.

This program will stress incremental plantings that deliver to the market on a regular, scheduled basis. The amount of produce delivered to the market is not as important as learning the steps involved in operating a farm business and executing those steps. This training program will teach participants how to supply a market on a regular, calculated basis.

Moloka'i Native Hawaiian Pollinator Program, Round 2 participants 2012

As part of this program, there is also a pollinator training program called the Moloka'i Native Hawaiian Beginning Farmer Pollinator Program where participants learn how to care for bees. Pollination of crops is critical at a time when bees are under assault from invasive pests including the Bee Hive Beetle and the Varroa

mite. The Varroa mite is presently not on Moloka'i. Many participants collect wild hives and place them on farms. Collaborators include UH Bee Project coordinators Ethel Villalobos and Scott Nakaido, and Brenda Kaneshiro of Moloka'i Meli, honey producers.

There is support infrastructure on the island, including a farm supply cooperative, a community college farm, a UH CTAHR demonstration farm and computer lab, a slaughter cooperative, a state irrigation system, a community kitchen incubator, and USDA Farm Services Agency and also USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Programs, including the Pacific Basin Plant Materials Center. Additional infrastructure to be developed as part of this program includes a tractor service and a farmers' market in the Hawaiian Homes Area. There's presently a fledgling tractor service with a ripper, disk, and brush cutter operated by the Ho'olehua Homesteaders Association that's utilized by the program. However, there is no farmer-managed Farmers Market on the island.

The program measures success by the number of farms created, pounds of product sold, value-added products created and sold, and successful execution of the production map. Partners include Ho'olehua Homesteaders Association, University of Hawai'i – Maui Campus Moloka'i Farm and, Hikiola Cooperative.

Class II participant Cora Schnackenberg installing drip irrigation to plant her windbreak.

This program is an educational initiative of the University of Hawai'i, College of Tropical Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service through a Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program grant from USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. The grant ends August 30, 2012, but the program is expected to continue.

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