

## Hawai'i's Growing Farm to School Movement

*Lydi Morgan Bernal, Coordinator, Hawai'i Farm to School and School Garden Hui*

At least 43% of all schools in Hawai'i -- K-12, public, charter, and independent -- have a school garden, according to the first ever statewide school garden survey, conducted by the Hawai'i Farm to School and School Garden Hui in 2012. School gardens are not a new idea for Hawai'i. Until the late 1960s, school gardens were common outdoor classrooms in Hawai'i's schools, growing food for children and families, providing physical activity, and helping to supply the school cafeteria. These gardens also connected children to the land and the idea of self-reliance, ecosystem health, and stewardship. In the past decade, administrators, teachers, parents, and communities across Hawai'i are rebuilding school gardens and working to integrate place-based experiential learning into the school curriculum.



*Farm to school programs create connections between local farms and schools, bringing fresh locally grown food to students through healthy snack programs and school meals. Photo courtesy of Kokua Hawai'i Foundation.*

As part of Hawai'i's growing farm to school movement, demand for fresh locally grown food is also on the rise as an increasing number of schools implement healthy snack and salad bar programs through school-based initiatives and the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (for schools with 50% or more free and reduced lunch participation). Meanwhile, leaders continue to work toward solutions for broad scale procurement of locally grown food for school meals.

The National Farm to School Network broadly defines farm to school as “programs that connect schools (PreK-12) and local farms with the objectives of serving healthy meals in school cafeterias, improving student nutrition, providing agriculture, health, and nutrition education opportunities, and supporting local and regional farmers.” School gardens are a key component of farm to school programs as the hands-on experiential stimulus for inspiring students' interest in and awareness of where their food comes from and why it matters.

In Hawai'i, farm to school programs:

- ▶ Link fresh locally grown food with school meal and snack programs;
- ▶ Reconnect students with the 'āina through school gardens, agriculture programs, and farm field trips;

- ▶ Increase consumption of locally grown food by increasing awareness, access, and availability; and
- ▶ Grow future farmers.

Importantly, the farm to school movement in Hawai‘i directly addresses the strategic objectives of our state’s new “Increased Food Security and Food Self-Sufficiency Strategy,” published in October 2012 by the Office of Planning (Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism) in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture, which are to:

1. Increase demand for and access to locally grown foods;
2. Increase production of locally grown foods; and
3. Provide policy and organizational support to meet food self-sufficiency needs.



*"The Best Day of My Life" A 4th grader proudly displays his class' school garden sweet potato harvest. Photo courtesy of Kokua Hawai‘i Foundation.*

Movement efforts are strengthened at the grass-roots level through Farm to School and School Garden Networks, active on the islands of Hawai‘i, Maui and Lana‘i, Moloka‘i, O‘ahu, and Kaua‘i and providing support to schools and communities in the form of professional development, resource sharing, and networking. The Hawai‘i Farm to School and School Garden Hui (HFSSGH) formed in 2010 and includes Farm to School and School Garden Network leaders from all six islands and representatives from the Hawai‘i Departments of Education and Health.

The goals of the HFSSGH are to:

1. Support the reestablishment of agricultural education pathways, P-20 (preschool through post secondary education);
2. Increase the procurement of locally grown and produced food by Hawai‘i schools; and
3. Strengthen the statewide farm to school and school garden movement through the sustained

organization and efforts of the island networks and the HFSSGH.

The HFSSGH looks forward to increasing collaboration with the University of Hawai‘i as part of a growing statewide coalition in support of agricultural education. HFSSGH will be active during the 2014 legislative session in support of the creation of October as Hawai‘i Farm to School and School Garden Month and the establishment of a Farm to School program and position(s) within our state government.

Visit [www.hawaiischoolgardenhui.org](http://www.hawaiischoolgardenhui.org) for more information, resources, and links to the island networks. Contact: [schoolgardenhui@kohalacenter.org](mailto:schoolgardenhui@kohalacenter.org).

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*Article content is the sole responsibility of the author. For more information about this article, contact Lydi Morgan Bernal, email: [lydi@kokuahawaiiifoundation.org](mailto:lydi@kokuahawaiiifoundation.org).*