

GoFarm Hawai'i: Revitalizing Local Agriculture

Revitalizing Hawai'i Agriculture

Hawai'i's agricultural sector faces critical challenges as it shifts from a plantation-based economy to a diversified system. Reliance on imported food (85-90%) leaves the state highly vulnerable to supply chain disruptions. Since 2017, the number of farms has declined by 10%, with 78% earning less than \$25,000 annually, and nearly half of farmers (48%) are 65 or older. High costs for land, labor, and inputs strain farm financial sustainability, while workforce shortages and climate change add further pressures. These factors underscore the urgent need for innovation and investment to secure Hawai'i's food security and economic resilience.

Localizing Resilience

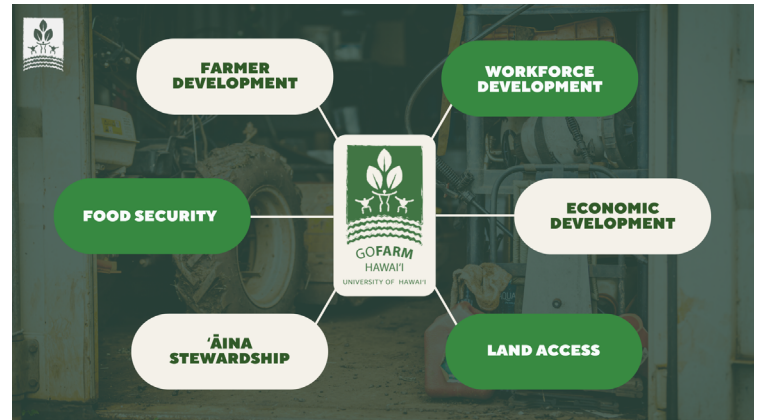
Revitalizing Hawai'i's agricultural economy and food system requires creating new jobs and training skilled farmers. GoFarm Hawai'i (GFH) leads this effort by growing small-scale, diversified farm businesses and increasing local food production.

At five training sites across O'ahu, Hawai'i Island, Maui, and Kaua'i, GFH offers an 8-month certificate-based farmer training program combining classroom instruction and hands-on experience in vegetable production and business management. GFH's "agri-preneurs" gain practical skills to grow food sustainably, manage profitable businesses, and market their products effectively. Additionally, graduates can enter the AgIncubator program, which offers up to three years of land access and support to launch independent farms. Many alumni establish their own agribusinesses or take on pivotal roles in Hawai'i's agricultural sector, strengthening food security statewide.

In addition to training, GFH provides free one-on-one business consulting, technical support, and ongoing workshops to help farmers improve yields, increase revenues, access farmland, and achieve financial stability.

Community Empowerment

- Since 2013, GFH has trained over 600 farmers, with graduates averaging 44 years old—20 years younger than the average U.S. farmer.



GoFarm Hawai'i supports local farmers and agribusinesses.

- In 2024, GFH provided 15,430 training hours to 88 AgXcel students. Graduates are projected to grow 1.8 million pounds of food over the next five years.
- Since 2022, about 90% of AgXcel graduates started farm businesses or joined the agriculture workforce, with 49 running businesses at GFH sites.
- In 2024, 23 AgIncubators earned \$295,000 from 4.25 acres, outperforming 59% of Hawai'i farmers. Since 2017, AgIncubator sales have totaled nearly \$1.5 million.
- Since 2022, GFH has awarded \$260,000 in grants to 12 graduates to expand their farms.
- In 2024, the AgBusiness program provided 1:1 support to 110 farmers and trained over 700 in farm business viability skills.
- Responding to community needs, GFH launched Agri-Floristry and AgOrchard courses, training 120 participants since 2022.

Janel Yamamoto

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GoFarm Hawai'i Graduate Testimonials

Building Confidence Through Financial Literacy

"It opened up a door into the farming community and created many valuable relationships. It gave me the financial literacy of startup costs in a farm, my first exposure to cash-flow projections to determine business viability, and allowed me to feel confident investing into farming as a career. Without significant financial liability created by mistakes or start-up costs, the program provided a low-stress environment that made it easy to learn valuable lessons from."

– Ian Kennedy, AgIncubator farmer, Strata Farms, Waimānalo Cohort 15

Farming for Community and Health

"It has inspired me to want to grow food to feed not only myself but the greater community. I feel that I can pursue a farming business, knowing that I have the support of GoFarm to help me be successful. They also have a large network of professionals that they can connect us with and everyone is so gracious and giving of their time and information to support us in becoming successful business owners."

– Christy Inda, AgIncubator farmer, In Da Garden, Maui Cohort 8



Food Security and Resilience

"GoFarm has been an invaluable experience, providing me with essential knowledge and hands-on training that has significantly deepened my understanding of sustainable agriculture. The program's focus on developing successful farm businesses is admirable and has empowered many aspiring farmers. The GoFarm program has given me a deeper insight into the collective challenges we face on the islands and has sparked ideas for how we might address these issues to foster greater food security and community resilience."

– Geoffrey Farmer, Kaua'i Cohort 13

Confidence and Support for New Farmers

"It has given me confidence to move forward with ag projects knowing that there is a network of support and knowledge available and accessible. It has also given me the knowledge to start farming vegetables, which I had zero knowledge of before."

– Davis Price, Aloha 'Āina Poi Company, Kamananui Cohort 11

Hands-On Learning and Practical Knowledge

"I cannot speak highly enough of the GoFarm program! It is designed to set you up for success. The hands-on approach to everything from soil to getting our products to the consumer is something no other schooling I have done has provided. The knowledge and experience we have gained through the GoFarm program is truly priceless."

– Chelsea Cox, Salty Roots Farmstead, Nā'ālehu, Hawai'i Island Cohort 6

Success Stories

Leanne and Dan Mahalak of Kai-wiki Food Forest near Hilo joined GoFarm Hawai'i's AgXcel program in 2021. They became part of the first AgIncubator cohort at the GoFarm 'Alae site, selling produce to local restaurants and grocers while establishing their 5-acre home farm. Combining regenerative agroforestry with market gardening, they now grow diverse crops and sell to local aggregators, supporting food sovereignty. A \$25K GoFarm/American AgCredit grant helped repurpose pasture into vegetable production, and they've developed value-added products like shiso extract and comfrey salve with GoFarm's support.



AgXcel students on Kaua'i celebrating the harvest of their communal crop.

Rob Barreca, who completed GoFarm in Waimānalo, recognized the need for greater efficiency in connecting farmers with customers. After graduating in 2015, he founded Farm Link Hawai'i, a marketplace created by farmers, for farmers. Farm Link Hawai'i has become the premier platform for local online grocery shopping, offering daily deliveries across O'ahu. By 2023, the company achieved impressive annual sales of \$2.8 million, solidifying its role in supporting Hawai'i's local food system.



GoFarm students learning during an in-field class in Waimānalo.

Haley and Matthew McKinnon, who met during their time in the GoFarm program, went on to establish Ahiki Acres, a farm dedicated to feeding the local community through restaurant sales, farmers' markets, and an online marketplace. In 2024, they achieved their highest revenue yet, grossing over \$200,000 on just a 1/2-acre plot at the Waimānalo site. With GoFarm's support, they are now transitioning to their own farmland in Waimānalo, where they plan to expand their operations. GoFarm also provided technical assistance that helped them secure a \$120,000 USDA RFSI grant to further invest in their farming future.

GoFarm Hawai'i (GFH) Team

Janel Yamamoto and Laura Ediger, Directors
Danny Randerson, Farm Coach, 'Alae, Hawai'i Island
Jin-Wah Lau, Farm Coach, Kaua'i
Jake H Sipes, Farm Coach, Pūlehunui, Maui
Daniel Carroll, Farm Coach, Kamananui, O'ahu
Rachel LaDrig, Farm Coach, Waimānalo, O'ahu
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Alyssa Lee, AgBusiness Consultant
Erik Shimizu, AgBusiness Consultant
Pomai Weigert, AgBusiness Consultant

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Britton Price, Farm Coach/Special Projects
Jamie Ronzello, Grants Program Specialist
Vanessa Zimmermann, Program Administrative Coordinator

Advisory Panel

Strategizes program direction and industry needs. Many provide education, guidance, and opportunities for GFH program.

Dr. Jeremy Elliott-Engel, Associate Dean & Associate Director for Cooperative Extension
Dr. Theodore Radovich, Associate Specialist, Dept. of Tropical Plant and Soil Sciences; Sustainable and Organic Agriculture Program Co-Coordinator
Dr. Koon-Hui Wang, Associate Professor and Chair, Dept. of Plant and Environmental Protection Sciences
Dr. Noa Lincoln, Associate Professor, Dept. of Tropical Plant and Soil Sciences; Indigenous Crops and Cropping Systems
Jari Sugano, County Administrator; former Extension Agent (EA)
Joshua Silva, O'ahu EA
Amjad Ahmad, O'ahu EA
Jensen Uyeda, O'ahu EA
Rosemary Gutierrez-Coarite, Maui County EA
Jennifer Hawkins, Molokai EA
Sharon Motomura-Wages, Hawai'i Island EA
Kylie Tavares, Hawai'i Island EA
Emilie Kirk, Kaua'i EA
James Keach, Kaua'i EA
Kiersten Akahoshi, Department of Hawaiian Home Lands EA
Lydi Bernal, Farm to School EA
Russell Galanti, Ornamental EA

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Hawai'i 'Ulu Cooperative
Kaua'i Community College
Mahi Pono
Agricultural Leadership Foundation of Hawai'i
AgTraining and Technical Assistance and AgFinance Network members
American AgCredit and CoBank
Farm Link Hawai'i
Feed the Hunger Fund
Hawai'i AgriTourism Assoc. and Hawai'i Tourism Authority
Hawai'i Department of Agriculture
Hawai'i Farmers Union United
Hawai'i Food Hub Hui
Hawai'i Good Food Alliance
Hawai'i Investment Ready
Hawai'i Land Trust
Honolulu, Kaua'i, Maui, and Hawai'i Counties
Ho'ola Veteran Services
Kokua Hawai'i Foundation
North Shore EVP
O'ahu Research Conservation & Development
Pacific Gateway Center
Regional Food Business Center
Sust'ainable Molokai
The Food Basket
The Kohala Center
UH Leeward Community College
UH Sea Grant
Ulupono Initiative
USDA Farm Service Agency
USDA NIFA
USDA NRCS
USDA Rural Development
Local farmers
Local lenders

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