

Sustainable Organic Farm Training

by Gabriel Sachter-Smith

The SOFT (Sustainable Organic Farm Training) club is a student farm based at the University of Hawaii at Mānoa. Beginning approximately two years ago with the concept of a student farm among faculty at UH's CTAHR (College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources), the farm has grown into a primarily student run organization. Principally, the goal of the farm is to teach the basics of growing food sustainably via hands on experience from the time the seeds are planted until the crops are sold (or eaten!). We also plan to grow useful non-food crops such as gourds, fiber plants, and soap producing plants.



There is also an experimental component where students are encouraged to plant a variety of different crops in various systems to find out more about what we can grow. Weekly produce sales are held on the Mānoa campus where a small variety of crops (whatever can be harvested that week) are sold. Sale proceeds are small, and are put towards the cost of running the farm, mainly seeds, fertilizers and tools which are always in need and in short supply.



Although the bulk of students involved are from CTAHR's Department of Tropical Plant and Soil Sciences, the club is open to anyone and a wide range of students participate, including UH students from Natural Resources and Environmental Management, Botany, Political Science, Art and other departments and backgrounds. We even have an international intern from Germany who has been helping us develop our projects.

Multiple growing locations exist. CTAHR's Waimānalo research station is home to a one acre plot containing more than 20 different fruit trees, a collection of over 40 different banana varieties, sweet potatoes, an herb garden, a soon-to-be model agroforestry system and a recently acquired coffee plot among an assortment of other various crops. A smaller garden exists on campus at the Magoon research facility where vegetable crops are grown and harvested fresh for the weekly produce

sales. Additionally, the students of SOFT have teamed up with teachers at Noelani Elementary School in Mānoa to create a food garden for first graders.



The author standing next to the banana variety 'Kayinja'.

All student involvement is voluntary, and whatever money is made at the sales put towards the cost of activities.

Although we strive to be as self-sustainable as possible, we continue to rely on the support of CTAHR Administration, the Department of Tropical Plant and Soil Sciences, Dr. Doug Vincent, Dr. Linda Cox, Dr. Ted Radovich, and many other faculty and staff for providing resources to ensure we succeed. Other faculty and staff who we wish to thank for their continued contributions are: Roger Corrales and the Waimānalo research station crew for helping us to prepare new land for planting, Dr. Richard Manshardt and Dr. Kent Kobayashi for integrating the farm into their classes, Craig Okazaki for helping to coordinate the on campus plot, Jody Smith and James Leary for their time and advocacy of the concept of the student farm, Dr. Travis Idol for facilitating the acquisition of the coffee plot, Brooke Moreno for being a tremendous student leader and early organizer. We thank all those UH faculty and friends for their continued support.

For more information visit our website at: www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/sustainag/soft, or email us at: soft@hawaii.edu.