4-H Seed Camps
Seed Education for the Next Generation

The Situation
The COVID-19 pandemic caused a surge in demand for garden seeds, leading to shortages in Hawai‘i and throughout the world. As an island state that imports over 85% of its food supply, seeds are crucial to Hawai‘i’s food security. Seeds are also the state’s top agricultural crop, valued at over $100 million annually.

Despite the importance of seed production, local seed saving efforts and education are limited, especially for youth. Youth seed education in Hawai‘i can support local food systems, provide pathways to careers in seed production, and build understanding of important scientific concepts including adaptation, reproduction, and genetics.

Extension’s Response
With support from the UH-CTAHR Extension Seed Hui, Extension agent Marielle Hampton organized a series of 4-H Seed Camps for Hawai‘i Island youth. The program piloted curriculum adapted from 4-H and garden education programs with lessons on seed and flower anatomy, seed travel, edible seeds, and plant life cycles. Students engaged with learning objectives through hands-on activities: garden scavenger hunts, dissection, seed art, cooking, seed cleaning, and plant propagation. At the end of the program, students took seed packets home and potted plants to continue their gardening journey.

In 2023, 60 youth in grades K-8 attended 4-H day camps about seeds in Waimea, Kona, Kealakekua, and Honaunau. The camp format was adapted to fit each site and included week-long camps, special sessions at summer school, and a one-day event held on a school holiday. Three garden educators co-led the camps with the Extension agent, supported by volunteers.

Impacts and Outcomes
Program participants acquired new gardening skills and knowledge about the role of seeds in the food system. Youth harvested and took home locally grown seeds of fruits, vegetables, and herbs to plant or share. Twenty-seven participants made and brought home cuttings of edible crops.

Locally grown seeds and plants can improve garden productivity since crops are adapted to the environment, and seed saving or plant propagation saves families money by growing food without buying seeds or starts. All week-long campers achieved germination after planting seeds, which is an encouraging indicator for post-program gardening success.

After the program, 81% of 3rd-8th graders could explain why saving seeds is important. Many noted that seed saving prevents plant extinction, especially after natural disasters. With increasing climate-related risks in Hawai‘i, seed saving empowers youth to play a role in local food security, offering a positive outlet for environmental concerns and supporting food system resilience.

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References