



Aloha kākou!

It has been a little over 100 days since I joined the CTAHR family. Early on, a stakeholder asked me what I hoped to do during this initial period. I shared that my priorities would be to meet with people, listen and learn about needs and challenges, explore possible solutions and begin building new connections.

I feel fortunate to have made progress on these goals. Over the 100 days, I've had one-on-one and group meetings with our Maui Nui extension agents and staff, met with legislators, farmers, and partners at the Maui Department of Agriculture, UH Maui College, and other agencies, engaged frequently with the CTAHR leadership team, submitted grant proposals and explored other funding opportunities, and initiated steps to strengthen our operational efficiency. Conversations with County Administrators in O'ahu, Hawai'i, and colleagues in Kaua'i — where I am also serving as interim County Administrator — have also been very valuable.

These interactions have given me a deeper appreciation of the unique challenges and opportunities across Hawai'i's islands, the social, cultural, and historical influences on agriculture and the economy, and the shared vision many organizations hold for addressing food security and supporting local communities. As one stakeholder observed, the work ahead is significant, but I am encouraged by the dedication of everyone at CTAHR. Together, we remain committed to listening, learning, and working collaboratively to serve Hawai'i's people.

Hope you continue to enjoy this newsletter with updates of our programs. I am grateful for all the great work from our CTAHR Maui Nui team. I would like to take this opportunity to wish Kristina Cacpal, our junior extension agent on Moloka'i, the very best as she embarks on a new journey as a teacher and thank her for all her impactful work while she has been with us. Mahalo nui loa for your continued support!

Surendra Dara

Maui County Administrator
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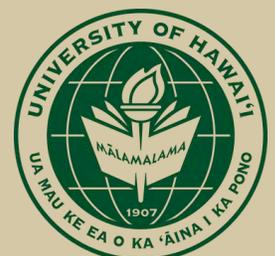
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Ka Nūhou - Ka 'Āina Ho'opulapula o Kēōkea

Gwen Morinaga-Kama - Jr. Extension Agent DHHL, Maui

Since 2016, the Kēōkea Homestead Farm Lots Association (KHFLA) has envisioned community efforts to support the economic, social, health, and cultural well-being of Kanaka Maoli in Kēōkea Homestead and in neighboring communities. To further their vision of a community center, KHFLA's initial endeavor was to establish a native plant garden, Malalani, with a fruit orchard and māla, geared towards education and an agricultural marketplace.



Kēōkea farmers at the soft opening of Malalani in 2019.

KHFLA's future goal is to establish a community center that will enhance the quality of life for Native Hawaiians and for the Kēōkea region as well. The vision plan includes Malalani, Hale Ola (a healing center), kūpuna daycare, Preschool to Kindergarten immersion school, K-6 Immersion school, and a multi-purpose hale and amphitheater.



Kēōkea members putting together hydroponic system

Preparing for KHFLA's annual fundraiser, the Kēōkea Ho'olaule'a on July 26, members with kōkua from UH CTAHR's Kula Research and Extension Station agricultural technicians installed three Kratky non-circulating hydroponic tables at Malalani to mitigate persistent drought conditions and ever-present feral deer population. Leading up to the Ho'olaule'a, KHFLA members planted hydroponic lettuce, bok choy, and watercress. With minimal inputs and maintenance, the results of their work were outstanding and inspirational.



Association members harvest their first hydroponic crops.

Building Skills, Serving Community: Youth Programs in Review

Nancy Ooki - Extension Agent 4-H & Youth Development Program, Maui

Several programs and events were offered this spring and summer through the youth development programming in Maui County. Led by Nancy Ooki, the 4-H and Youth Development Extension Agent, children on Maui, Moloka'i, and Lāna'i participated in several educational experiences that allowed them to learn new skills, create new relationships, and connect to the community and local agriculture around them.

4-H Youth Development Programs

Through the 4-H Youth Development program, children ages 5-19 completed projects such as communication, cooking, gardening, environmental science, and sewing, while also strengthening their skills in problem-solving, decision-making, public speaking, and leadership. Members joined other clubs to celebrate their experiences at the year-end County Achievement event and practiced their communication skills at the County Teach-In event where they demonstrated a recipe, skill, or other information-sharing with an audience and panel of judges.



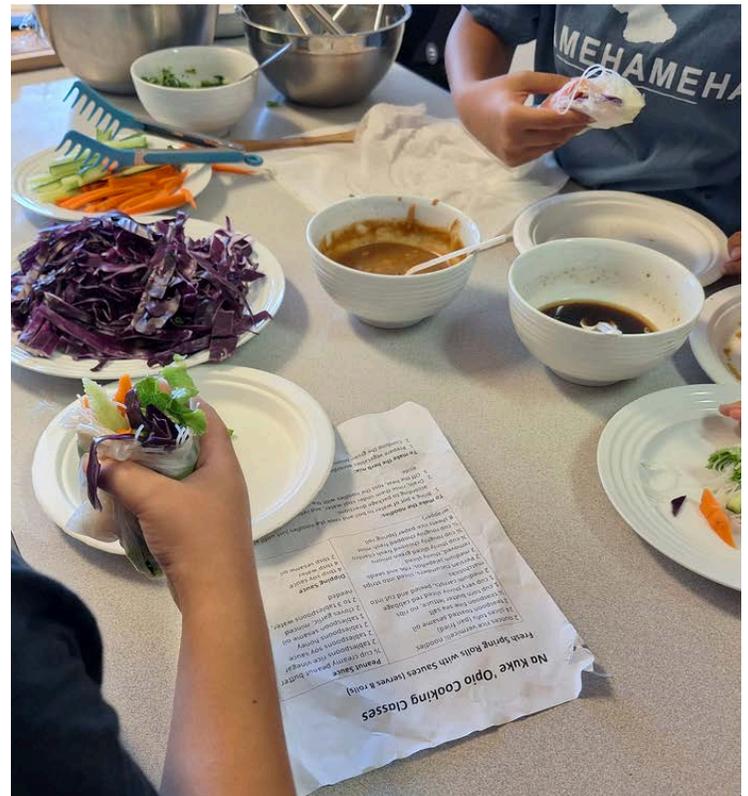
Gardening on Lāna'i

Lāna'i and Moloka'i

The 4-H program is also operating on Moloka'i and Lāna'i through the support of 4-H leaders on those islands. Clubs there participated in entrepreneurship, gardening, animal science, and community service projects, among other activities. They also visited Maui Island to connect with the Maui-based clubs and attend the Maui Ag Fest and Maui County 4-H Livestock Show.

Na Kuke 'Ōpio Program Partnership

This cooking project was a collaboration between The Food Basket and Maui County Cooperative Extension. The program was taught by Nancy Ooki and delivered to both the Makawao and Lahaina Boys and Girls Clubs during June and July. The focus of the classes was hands-on cooking while learning about local agriculture, kitchen safety, food skills, and food safety. Recipes included Quesadillas, Naan/Pita Break Pizzas, Somen Salad and Poi Pancakes. The program will be repeated next summer at the same location with new recipes.



Keiki sample their recipes

PONO Teen CERT Disaster Preparedness

The training, which the Maui Emergency Management Agency recognizes as the Teen Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training program, was delivered in Kihei during the summer. Youth completed 25 hours of training, including first aid, triage, fire suppression, and search and rescue. At the end of the program, youth were paired in teams with adult CERT trainees during a final disaster simulation exercise. Trainings are being planned for Moloka'i and Lāna'i this year and Maui next summer.

These are just some of the programs being conducted by the Maui County Youth Development Agent. For more information on any of the programs or upcoming opportunities please contact: Nancy Ooki at ooki@hawaii.edu.



Fire Safety Training



Search and Rescue Training

Master Gardener Program Update

Teri Fitzgerald, MG Volunteer

The mission of the University of Hawai'i Master Gardener Program is to "provide the public with unbiased, research-based information and sustainable management practices in tropical horticulture suitable for home gardens, local landscapes, urban environments, and the community." Master Gardener volunteer activities include: staffing booths at outreach events on Maui, hosting plant sales, conducting workshops, raising bees, and answering gardening questions for the home gardeners of Maui County through online system and phone lines at the County Extension office.

Some of the gardeners put in their volunteer hours at the CTAHR garden located on the Maui College campus. Last year the Maui Master Gardeners clocked in over 1,650 hours in the CTAHR garden. The dream is that the garden will one day be open for outreach events with demonstration gardens, workshops and learning opportunities for the community.



Irrigation Team

About nine teams run different functions at the garden with members working double and triple duty moving from team to team as needed.

The Irrigation Team keeps everything going in the garden, making sure that the precious water is delivered to the plantings as needed. Regular inspections and repairs continue to keep everything running smoothly. This is a very busy team handling many unplanned water features that show up routinely.

The Native Garden continues to be a space of discovery, experimentation, and growth. Recent trials have shown just how much microclimates matter. The team is committed to trying new things, whether it is swapping species, growing from seed and cutting, or experimenting with more mature plants.

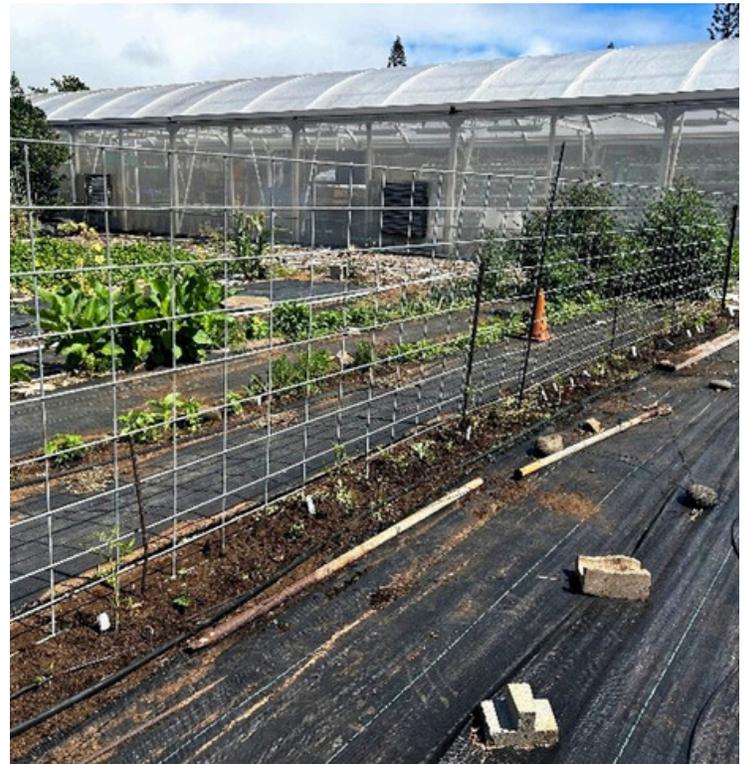
The Lei Garden continues to thrive thanks to the dedication of the team. Many lei have been made from the flowers in this garden. Looking ahead, there is interest in offering a lei-making class that would showcase the cultural importance of lei and highlight what plants in the garden can be used.



Transplanting for the Plant Sale

The Citrus Team cares for citrus in two areas of our orchard, as well as avocado trees, papaya, and plumeria. Originally, the larger citrus area was planted as an experimental plot with about 10 trees, each of a different variety. We now have eight surviving trees. In addition to the fruiting citrus, they have a rootstock tree, and hope to have a grafting workshop in the future.

The Food Bank Team is one of the newest teams, just beginning this year. Produce is being grown plus some crops are harvested from existing trees in the garden. The team has been hard at work improving the space, planting new crops and preparing for future crops. As always, they are building healthy soil with regular compost additions and keeping weeds at bay — one wheelbarrow at a time. Produce brought to the food bank has included okra, eggplant, tomatoes, peppers, herbs, lilikoi, beans, papaya, mangoes and ulu. Sweet potatoes will be coming soon. Over 700 pounds of produce has been delivered to the foodbank this year.



Food Bank Garden

The Worm Team brings food scraps from home and tends to the worms in our two worm homes. Worm farming involves cultivating worms to decompose organic waste, turning it into valuable compost known as worm castings. This process not only reduces waste but also produces a natural fertilizer that enhances soil health and plant growth.



P. Murray showing off his new worm hotel

Earl Fujitani, Our Longest-Serving Ag Tech

Surendra Dara, Maui County Administrator

Earl Fujitani is an agricultural research technician at CTAHR Maui with the longest service among the current team members. While every one of our team members is critical for our mission, agricultural research technicians play a very important role in maintaining our research facilities and assisting with the execution

of research studies and data collection. Without their invaluable support, research stations cannot function, whether it is in Maui or elsewhere in the world. I wanted to share my conversation with Earl in this newsletter, as he has accumulated nearly 25 years of service at CTAHR.

When did you join CTAHR?

I started working at the Kula Station in 2001 to assist with a collaborative project between CTAHR and USDA for areawide suppression of fruit flies. After the project ended in 2007, I joined CTAHR as an agricultural research technician.

What is your daily routine at work?

I assist in various tasks, including field preparation, setting up the irrigation system, planting seeds or transplants, managing weeds, harvesting crops, pruning protea, and data collection from research plots like counting insects or measuring yields.



Earl, completing one of his many tasks

What kind of changes have you seen in the station, its programs, and local agriculture and floriculture?

Growing up in Kula and living on a family farm, I have witnessed firsthand how Maui's economy has changed from agriculture to tourism. The number of local farms and the availability of locally grown produce gradually decreased.



Earl, explaining the onion harvest trial

What excites you in your job?

I have the opportunity to be where I enjoy the work and to be with co-workers who are like family. I am excited when we start a new project that implements new technologies and contributes to the health and safety of my community, and supports local farmers and Maui's economy.

Do you have a favorite memory to share?

I have many. My most fulfilling memory is seeing the results from our research studies being used by the farmers. I also want to share an interesting memory from right after 9/11. We were going to a training in Hilo, with overalls, masks, and other PPE in our luggage. The flight got delayed as we were questioned about the PPE, and someone had to call and explain before we were allowed to board the flight.



Earl, navigating the Kula Station

Keiki, 'Āina, & 'Ike: The Legacy of Farm to School

Kristina Cacpal, Jr. Extension Agent Farm to School, Moloka'i

Over the last few years, the Farm to School program, funded through USDA SNAP-Ed and UH CTAHR, has quietly, but powerfully, transformed school communities on Moloka'i and O'ahu — planting the seeds of knowledge, resilience, and connection across generations.

Now, as the formal program comes to a close, we take time to honor the impact, the relationships, and the deep learning that has taken place — not just in classrooms and gardens, but in the hearts and minds of our keiki, our kumu, and our community.

Hands in the Soil

Since 2023, Farm to School on Moloka'i has supported over 60 educators and reached more than 350 students, creating hands-on learning rooted in both science and culture. The work has focused on garden education, nutrition education, and teacher training, all while building meaningful relationships with local farmers, organizations, and cultural practitioners.

In our school gardens, students didn't just grow food — they grew curiosity, confidence, and a deeper connection to the 'āina. Activities included:

- Kalo planting and harvesting, culminating in Huki and Ku'i Kalo Day, where students pounded their own poi and learned about the nutritional and cultural value of this sacred plant with the support of Moloka'i kalo farmer, Josh Pastrana.
- Making kim chee with cabbage students had grown



Keiki cleaning and pounding kalo

themselves — combining cultural food practices with science and health.

- Seed saving workshops, where students learned sustainability practices.
- ‘Uala ‘Ohana Night at the School where keiki, staff, and ‘ohana learned about the nutritional value of ‘uala, propagation, taste tested, and planted slips to start at home.

These lessons went beyond textbooks. Students often shared that gardening was their favorite part of school, and many said they were more open and curious to try new foods simply because they had grown them.

Education Through Agriculture

At the heart of the program was a deep investment in teacher development. Farm to School offered rich, culturally grounded training to help educators bring agriculture into the classroom in ways that felt

meaningful and manageable. Programs included:

- **All About ‘Ulu (Statewide PD):** Teachers learned how to grow, care for, and propagate ‘ulu (breadfruit), culminating in a cooking session using locally sourced ‘ulu to connect plant science, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.
- **Ho‘oulu‘ai Teacher Garden Training (Moloka‘i):** Educators got their hands in the soil as they learned how to build garden beds, transplant starts, install irrigation, and manage compost. But more importantly, they learned how to connect sense of place to agriculture — rooting their curriculum in local history, sustainability, and the importance of knowing where your food (and your students) come from.
- **Lepo & Roots STEAM Workshop:** Educators learned how to use plants, such as ‘ōlena, ukiuki, and beets for dye and soil for painting. Another way for them to make learning exciting and integrate ag in the classroom.

This work helped build bridges between science, culture, and classroom practice — all while preparing the next generation of agriculture leaders, caretakers, and eaters.



Lepo & Roots STEAM Workshop participants with their plant dyed creations

Partnerships that Strengthened Community

A big part of what made this program successful was the deep partnerships it fostered — with farmers, nonprofits, educators, and community leaders.

Collaborators included:

- Uncle Bobby Alcain of 'Āina Pulapula
- UH Maui College – Moloka'i
- Moloka'i Land Trust
- Moloka'i Digital Bus
- Lili'uokalani Trust – Moloka'i
- Pu'u O Hoku Ranch
- Sust'āinable Moloka'i
- Ming Wei Koh of Center for Getting Things Started
- Hawai'i Public Health Institute
- And numerous local farmers and ag producers

Together, we co-created experiences like farm field trips, community workdays, and shared learning events that made agriculture real and relevant for students.

We also partnered with School Behavioral Health Counselors for a Suicide Prevention event, providing plant starts and care to show how gardening can support mental health and reduce stress — reinforcing that growing food also grows wellness and connection.



Keiki exploring living things in our soil, planting seeds, learning about 'uala, and their first harvest.



Keiki learning how to test soil, weigh harvests, and seed save

The Work Continues

Although the USDA SNAP-Ed and UH CTAHR funding is concluding, the Farm to School movement is far from over. The community on Moloka'i — and across Hawai'i — remains deeply committed to continuing this work.

We must continue advocating for better nutrition in schools, supporting educators who want to teach from and for the 'āina, and creating systems that prepare our youth to lead in food, farming, and sustainability.

To those who participated — educators, students, farmers, organizers, and supporters — mahalo for helping grow something deeply meaningful.

Stay informed, stay connected, and keep supporting agriculture in our schools. When we nourish our keiki and our land, we nourish our future.

Successful Pesticide Core Skills 2-Day Course

Rosemary Gutierrez-Coarite, Associate Extension Agent for Edible Crops

A Pesticide Core Skills 2-Day Course was conducted by Rosemary Gutierrez-Coarite and Hanna Lutgen on September 10th and 11th at the Community Service Building at Maui College. This course covered all of the material included in the Core pesticide exam along with PPE demonstrations, real world application and calibration practice, and directed classroom scenarios to practice label comprehension. The participants learned all relevant pesticide laws, principles of IPM, equipment calibration, and how to apply pesticides correctly and safely. This course not only served to train aspiring certified applicators to pass the Core exam, but also as a way for established certified applicators to refresh their baseline pesticide knowledge and earn a total of 8 CEU's towards recertification. A total of 26 people from landscape industry and edible crop growers participated in this course.

Our acknowledgments go to the presenters, Edmar Castillo (HIOSH), Maxwell Bendes (HDoA Pesticide Branch), and Mark Dragich (CTAHR), as well as to Maui County Farm Bureau for all the collaboration.



Maxwell Bendes in the classroom (left), Maxwell Bendes and Mark Dragich at sprayer demonstration in PPE (top two), and Rosemary Gutierrez-Coarite, Mitch MacCluer (HDoA), Edmar Castillo, Maxwell Bendes, and Mark Dragich after successfully concluding a very informative and useful course.

UPCOMING
EVENTS

Exciting events are on the way —
mark your calendar and be part of
the action!



UNIVERSITY of HAWAII at MĀNOA

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

COLLEGE OF TROPICAL AGRICULTURE AND HUMAN RESILIENCE

IPM WORKSHOP

GET *local*
GROW EAT THINK
UH COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

EVOLUTION OF AGRICULTURE AND CROP PROTECTION: INTEGRATED PEST
MANAGEMENT, BIOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS, AND RESISTANCE MANAGEMENT

MEET AND GREET WITH MAUI EXTENSION
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR, SURENDRA DARA
DR. DARA WILL BE TEACHING A WORKSHOP
FOCUSED ON PEST MANAGEMENT

*This workshop is a first of many that Dr.
Dara will be teaching on Molokai*

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Mechanisms of insecticide resistance



WORKSHOP DETAILS

SEPTEMBER 17, 2025 9AM-11AM

MOLOKAI EXTENSION OFFICE AND DEMONSTRATION FARM ON PUUPEELUA AVE

THIS WORKSHOP IS OPEN TO EVERYONE WITHOUT REGARD TO RACE, AGE, SEX, COLOR, OR DISABILITY. EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES ARE ACCESSIBLE FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES. FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REQUEST AN AUXILIARY AID OR SERVICE (E.G., SIGN LANGUAGE, INTERPRETER, DESIGNATED PARKING, OR MATERIAL IN ALTERNATIVE FORMAT).