Food+ Policy: 2025 Intentions

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Vision:

To be a fixture in Hawai‘i’s food system, pioneering systems change as a thought leader.

Mission Statement:

To empower Hawai‘i's students, farmers, and communities to strengthen local food systems through education and civic engagement.

Identified Issue Areas:

1. **Increase civic engagement in younger generations through empowerment and education.**

   Why? There are a lot of complaints about how our government is run but there is also a concerning amount of people, young and old, who need to learn how our local government works and believe that our voices matter.

   Promoting empowerment and education, along with providing resources for civic engagement is essential for realizing our vision of a food system in Hawaii that is sustainable, equitable, and nourishing. It not only benefits individuals but also strengthens communities and enhances the potential for positive, sustainable change in Hawaii's education, agriculture, and food systems.

2. **Increase opportunities and remove barriers for young people to engage in small farming for local consumption – as a way of life or a career.**

   Why? In 2022[1] the average age of a farmer in Hawai‘i was ~60 years old, indicating that many young people today do not see farming as a good career or lifestyle option.

[1] USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, (2022). Census of Agriculture. Complete data available at https://www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/AgCensus/2022/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/Hawaii/

Additionally, Hawai‘i’s post-plantation era approach to agriculture has been primarily corporate, focusing on producers that operate at a large scale with little regard for ‘āina stewardship.

The government should focus on increasing opportunities and removing barriers for young people to engage in small farming and food production for local consumption. We need to build a food system where Native Hawaiians and a diversity of people can own, access, and participate in caring for ‘āina, where farmers and farm workers can make a living wage with benefits, and where cooperatives and community-based organizations provide the connective tissue to facilitate exchange between many small producers and consumers.

3. Decrease dependency on imported food and agricultural goods and increase local farmers and value-added products for Hawaii food resiliency.

Why? Hawai‘i imports 80-95% of our food, making us heavily reliant on distant sources. Situated about 2,000 miles from the mainland, we face vulnerability during disaster or import disruptions[2]. Farmers work laborious jobs that may not allow them to advocate for themselves or get the necessary resources and education.

Supporting our local farmers and their ability to produce for the community is crucial to the State's sustainability and resiliency to any disruptions in our local food system. Having updated infrastructures for producing value-added products can help increase the shelf-life of farmer produce and convenience for local consumers.

4. Incentivize and support regenerative and Native Hawaiian traditional farming and fishing practices.

Why? Conventional agriculture releases carbon and other emissions into the atmosphere, accelerates global warming, and contributes to ecosystem damage. Regenerative agriculture counters climate change by sequestering carbon in the soil and creating habitat for diverse species.

[2] Office of Planning, Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism (2012). Increased Food Security and Food Self-Sufficiency Strategy: A State Strategic/Functional Plan

In Hawai‘i, regenerative agriculture has a role to play in healing degraded ‘āina from the plantation era. Native Hawaiian traditional farming, fishing, and land/water management practices--which are uniquely suitable to these islands--must be part of the way forward as a matter of practicality in facing climate change, as well as a matter of justice for Native Hawaiians.[3]

5. Create access to healthy, culturally appropriate foods by supporting policies that serve the health and wellness of the people, the environment, social equity, and economic stability of Hawaii.

Why? It is not commonly recognized that food and food policies have the capacity to harbor socioeconomic health inequalities. Low-income families stretch their buying power by purchasing cheap, convenient, but unhealthy food items that usually contain a much higher concentration of sugar, salt, and other complex preservatives that are harder for the human body to metabolize. This contributes to the development of non-communicable diseases such as cancer, obesity, allergies, high blood pressure, arthritis, diabetes, and stroke.

The prevalence of non-communicable diseases in Indigenous and low-income migrant families emanates from adopting Western diets and being cut off from the ability to grow/harvest and eat healthy, traditional foods. In 2023, food insecurity affected nearly 1 in 3 households in Hawai’i, impacting a range of ethnicities, young adults, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, higher education students, and those with health conditions/illness.[4]

6. Provide farm-to-school programming--production, education & local procurement--for all learners.

Why? Our kids deserve to eat the best food. Locally sourced food tends to be more nutritious, and because processed foods are known to lack important nutrients, there are health advantages to localizing relationships between schools and producers but many keiki do not know where or how their food grows, and this is reflected in large amounts of cafeteria waste.[5]

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[3] Trisos, C. H., Auerbach, J., & Katti, M. (2021). Decoloniality and anti-oppressive practices for a more ethical ecology. *Nature ecology & evolution*, *5*(9), 1205–1212. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-021-01460-w

[4] Hawai‘i Food Bank (2023). The State of Food Insecurity in Hawai‘i 2023

[5] Windward Zero Waste School Hui (2024). Total Resources Recovered from All Schools

Farm to School programs enhance the health and nutrition of students and families, teach important life skills, encourage waste reduction, reduce carbon emissions, and help make better connections between food, people, and ʻāina. The program also connects keiki to local producers and creates relationships that enhance children's understanding of the food system. By focusing our efforts on strengthening the Farm to School programs while also creating partnerships that aid in regionalizing school lunch menus, keiki will have access to more culturally appropriate foods like kalo, ʻulu, and local bananas. We must ensure our keiki know what these foods are and have some type of pilina with their origin and moʻolelo.

7. Support policies that promote regenerative agriculture and encourage economic and environmental sustainability for Hawaiʻi.

Why? Hawaiʻi's economic and environmental ecosystems are vulnerable due to over-reliance on imported goods, and misuse and mismanagement of natural resources. Currently, Hawaiʻi imports around 85-95% of its food, leaving the islands highly dependent on external systems, which in turn negatively impacts local economies and the environment.

Supporting regenerative agriculture helps foster biodiversity, restore and maintain healthy soils, fisheries, and waterbodies, create pesticide buffer zones to protect communities, and demonstrate that Hawaiʻi values our environment. These practices also reduce the island's carbon footprint, contribute to more resilient local food systems, prevent economic leakage[6], and support the long-term sustainability of agriculture in Hawaiʻi.

By focusing on regenerative methods, Hawaiʻi can develop self-sustaining systems that prioritize environmental health while fostering economic stability. Through our efforts, we can also reduce the negative impacts of conventional farming practices, such as soil erosion and pesticide use, which harm both the ʻāina and the health of the local community. Encouraging local production through policy will ultimately move us closer to food sovereignty, strengthening Hawaiʻi's resilience against climate change and other global disruptions.

[6] Kenton, W. (n.d.). *Leakage: Definition in economics and examples*. Investopedia. https://www.investopedia.com/terms/l/leakage.asp