

Hawai'i Island Food Security Symposium: Our Food, Our Community, Our Future October 5-6, 2007 at the Sheraton Keauhou Bay

The time has come to make a strong positive statement for the future of our Island's agriculture, with an emphasis on the *keiki*, their education and their future participation in our communities as leaders. We can assist our island to eat in a healthier way, creating a thriving and resilient economy while preserving our precious natural and cultural resources.

This two-day Symposium will explore the visions, possibilities, ideas, and practical solutions to answering the question "How can Hawai'i Feed Itself?" We hope this conference will be a catalyst not only for changes in policy and practice at the island level, but a convening of the agricultural community to create a compelling vision for the future of food and farming across the state. In this effort we build on the work of Hawaiian leaders who have organized *Ho'ea 'Ea: Hands Turned to the Soil* Conference in June 2007 in Hilo. After the October 5-6 Symposium, Slow Food Hawaii will sponsor a month-long series of events that showcase local foods and food producers. The month will end with a Hamakua Alive! agricultural festival.

Project description

In collaboration with a diverse coalition of organizations, businesses, and government agencies, the Hawaii Island Food Security Symposium (HIFSS) will bring together leading national technical and policy experts, local policy-makers, private-sector stakeholders, farmers, and citizens to develop a shared vision for a more ecologically sound, locally self-sustaining agricultural system for Hawaii's future.

The purpose of the symposium is to generate wide-spread awareness of local food security issues and garner support for strategic actions that will improve the viability of sustainable island agricultural ventures. Increasing our food security in the islands is critically important. Although Hawaii is the most isolated land mass in the world, we only have an 8-day supply of food in the islands and we rely on imports for more than 90% of the food we consume. For the people of Hawaii to truly be prepared, safe, and secure we must increase the amount of food that we produce and consume locally. Supporting family farmers and moving our agricultural system towards locally-based food systems is key to creating economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability for Hawaii.

We see the symposium and the month of events that will follow as a pilot program that could be replicated in locally-appropriate ways across the state. We believe it is very important for every island in Hawaii to engage in the process of coming together to plan the most viable agricultural future for their communities. Both the primary organizing entities for the Hawaii Island symposium, The Kohala Center as a research and education institute with national academic partners and Hawaii SEED as a statewide coalition with active member groups in every county-are in an ideal position to help spearhead this effort, not only on Hawaii Island but to assist with similar events on other islands in the future.

The first day of the Symposium will bring together nationally recognized experts in the field of agricultural technology, policy, and financing with leaders of Hawaii Island's public and private sectors to explore and discuss effective, economically feasible policies and projects that will support the growth of diversified agriculture aligned with environmental preservation. The second day of the HIFSS will invite members of the public to learn from national and local agricultural experts and join the discussions initiated on the previous day, with a special emphasis on educating and training our youth. This will entail facilitated opportunities for public participants and the assembled experts to develop strategic policy and educational projects, identify key production and distribution issues, increase access to land and financing, etc. Dr. William Steiner, Dean of the University of Hawai'i at Hilo College of Agriculture, Forestry, & Natural Resources, will host and facilitate these sessions.

A cornerstone of the event will be the Local Foods Exposition for farms, businesses, organizations, and projects to showcase successful approaches to increasing island food security, food quality, and sustainable agriculture. We anticipate that exhibitors will include agricultural producers, school and community food projects, and local agricultural distributors and suppliers.

By bringing together farmers, policy makers, consumers, and other concerned citizens, the symposium and the events that follow will help rally the people in our community around a vision of

a self-sufficient local food system. To make the changes that we seek, we must have a collective focus on changing the way our agricultural lands are used, the way food is produced, and the way locally produced food is marketed and distributed. These gatherings will help coalesce the energy, ideas, and people that are needed to shift the future of Hawaii's agriculture towards sustainable food production.

During the Hawaii Island Food Security Symposium we intend to create deeper working relationships between environmental, farming, and cultural groups to unite around healthy Hawaiian agricultural systems. Our lack of local food security poses serious threats to all these groups and the interests they serve, and we see this conference as a special opportunity to bring a diverse range of constituent groups together to create an alternative vision for our agricultural future.

Organizing Partners

The Kohala Center is an independent, not-for-profit environmental studies institute with a mission to respectfully engage the Island of Hawai'i as a living laboratory for humanity. Since its establishment, The Kohala Center has respectfully engaged the natural and cultural assets of Hawaii Island to produce new knowledge about the natural world and about global environmental challenges, so that communities on the Island, in the Pacific, and around the world can thrive. Operating at the intersection of culture, science, and community, The Kohala Center accomplishes its work through partnerships, developing cutting edge research and teaching programs, along with policy education initiatives, and then involving Island K-12 students in these programs. In addition to working with the University of Hawai'i, Hawai'i Community College, the Kamehameha Schools, the Hawai'i State Department of Education, the Edith Kanaka'ole Foundation, and Na Kalai Wa'a Moku o Hawai'i, The Kohala Center has initiated projects with Brown University, Cornell University, Rocky Mountain Institute, the University of California at Santa Barbara, and Yale University, among others. The Hawaii Island Food Security Symposium is part of a larger Kohala Center program, Planet Hawaii, which takes an integrated approach to examining natural, material, and social systems in order to find pathways to greater sustainability and security for island communities.

Hawaii SEED is a coalition of grassroots groups on each of the five major Hawaiian islands taking action to promote food sovereignty and security in the state. In 2000, concerned farmers and citizens from across the state gathered in Kona to discuss what they could do to move Hawaiian agriculture away from genetic engineering. They formed a non-centralized, grassroots coalition at this conference to work together across islands to make change on this issue and have worked closely ever since, growing in strength, effectiveness, and diversity. In July of 2005, the coalition became an official non-profit organization under the name Hawaii SEED.

Additional collaborating organizations: For this symposium we will be working with a wide range of organizations and institutions including the Hawaii Island Economic Development Board, the Farm Bureau, Hawaii Organic Farmers Association, the Kona-Kohala Chamber of Commerce, Rocky Mountain Institute, Slow Food Hawaii, and the University of Hawaii at Hilo.