



Overview:

To increase food production, sustainability, and self-sufficiency on Kaua'i, we need more farmers. The [2013 Hawai'i Agricultural Skill Panel Report](#) made a clear call to action to: create and strengthen high school internship and college mentorship programs; and to engage in mentoring students by people with experience with new farmers, specifically on Kaua'i. Participants involved in this statewide report included over 600 stakeholders, including participants from the private, nonprofit, and government sectors. The #1 workforce challenge identified on Kaua'i was the disconnect between educational institutions and the agriculture industry.

We're all aware that the average age of a farmer in Hawai'i is 59 years old, but after releasing our [Natural Resources Career Pathway Guide](#) for the island of Kaua'i, we recognized critical gaps in educational opportunities for hands-on farming experience available for early-career development and mentorship, most importantly, internships. According to Keiki to Career Kaua'i's 2014 Kaua'i Youth Report, only 24.7% of Kaua'i youth aged 16-19 are employed. In 2013, only 82.0% of Kaua'i 16-24 year-olds were in school and/or employed. This rate is notably lower than the statewide average of 87.3% and also lower than the U.S. average of 85.4%.

In December 2015, we planned and marketed a free 3-day Ag Camp for ag students on the north side of the island, full of guest speakers, field trips, and hands-on projects; as well as a 3-day paid Ag Internship Program on the west side. The Ag Camp had to be canceled due to lack of applications, yet the Ag Internship Program demonstrated a high demand by receiving more applications than we initially had internship slots for. This further encouraged our direction towards offering paid internships over other forms of education for students, and we fully believe that an expanded Ag Internship Program for Kaua'i youth can help to meet these defined needs.

Malama Kaua'i, KUGA Agriculture, and IWI Farms piloted the *Kaua'i Ag Internship Program* with 10 high-school juniors and seniors from Waimea High School and Ke Kula Ni'ihau O Kekaha, in order to fine-tune programming for islandwide expansion. During Winter Break, students participated in their internship at a sustainable food project located at Gulick Rowell Mission House in Waimea with mentor Clint Snyder, while learning about soil, agroforestry, exotic fruit tree planting and care, composting, seed saving, and workplace professionalism. After completion of the internship, students were provided a \$200 stipend, recommendation letter, and internship evaluation.

Outcomes:

Hosting this pilot helped us to define structure of the program and see what worked and didn't for islandwide expansion in 2016. It was very reassuring to see that there was a strong demand by students for these kinds of hands-on internship opportunities, support from teachers in presenting to their classrooms, thankfulness by parents, willing and inspiring mentors available, and overall community support (including donations). Our outcomes with students after even such a short program was encouraging.

Students were recruited through in-class presentations within natural resources and agriculture classes at the high schools. 60% of the 11th and 12th grade students who participated in the program are of Native Hawaiian descent, demonstrating a strong interest from local and indigenous students with strong ancestral ties to the land.

Some feedback gathered from post-internship surveys included:

<i>The Ag Internship Program helped me:</i>	Yes	Somewhat	No
Learn more about farming and agriculture	100%		
Learn about farming and agriculture as a career	80%	20%	
Increase my job preparation and earning potential	80%	20%	
Increase my confidence in finding an agriculture job	90%	10%	
Have more confidence in myself	90%	10%	
Increase my interest & motivation to continue my education in agriculture	80%	20%	
Increase my interest & motivation to continue a career in agriculture	80%	20%	

What some of the students had to say:

"I learned how to make good all natural mulch, soil, and compost, also better or different ways of growing different plants. This internship showed me how to work with what I have and that hard work pays off. Learning all this stuff was the best part for me."

"First, always be on time to work. Second, pay attention, and last always have fun. It will help me learn how to plant with perfection and patience to get the perfect planting results. Mahalo much!"

"It impacted my knowledge of agriculture and ways to make our environment a better place. The planting I like most, maybe digging the holes too. The most best part was feeding the goat. It was also a fun thing to do instead of staying home and doing nothing."

"I gained some knowledge about soil life, the differences between anaerobic and aerobic. Getting to know Clint, and other kids, and learning new things. I think the Ag Internship Program is perfect."

"Some skills I gained would be communication and my work skills. Since there was new people I was working with it was hard to communicate at first. But as each day went on it became easier. This internship also sharpened my work ethic. It got me thinking about my future career. Just coming to work every day with a set time schedule was like practice for my future career."

All of the responses we heard from the general community were overwhelmingly positive and in support. Everyone wants to see our children succeed and have career development opportunities, but many also want to see Kaua'i grow more of their own food to increase our food security.



Future Goals:

If funding can be secured, our goal will be to offer 100 weeks of paid ag internships to local high school and college ag students across Kauaʻi for the next 3 years during Spring, Summer, and Winter school breaks.

Concurrently, we will be working to institutionalize ag internship programs within the high schools and colleges on island over the course of the 3 years, so that internships and mentoring can become a normalized and expected component of agricultural education.

We have already identified 4 farms across the island with previous education experience committed to providing mentorship by hosting interns in 2016, and are continuing to meet with farmers weekly to identify future Internship Site Partner Farms. We have also identified educational partners in the majority of high schools and Kauaʻi Community College willing to connect us to their ag students.

By seeing this program through for a few years, our hope is that the program will institutionalize itself with our support, since it is creating stronger relationships between farms and educational institutions; building workforce skills, professional experience and knowledge of students; and hopefully developing a preference for local labor with local farmers so that students can develop strong career pathways leading to future farm ownership. To do this, we are currently seeking to develop multi-year funding partnerships to see the program through 2018.

Mahalos

