

# Kaua'i Food Insecurity Survey

## Results Summary

Prepared by



RESULTS COLLECTED IN 2022



# About the Survey

## Participation

177 residents, representing 472 food insecure individuals\*, completed the Food Insecurity Survey between January 2022 to May 2022.

*\*290 adults & 182 keiki*

## Eligibility

Participants were all Kaua'i residents who experienced food insecurity within the previous 6 months.

## Sponsorship

This survey was funded in part by Hawai'i Dept. of Health SNAP-Ed, with produce bag sponsorships by individual donations.

## About Kaua'i's Food Insecurity

### 1 in 3

Kaua'i keiki are projected to be food insecure, approx. 33%

(The Pantry)

### 58%

of our food insecure are above the threshold to qualify for SNAP

(Feeding America)

### 26%

increase in SNAP recipients in Hawai'i from 2019 to 2020

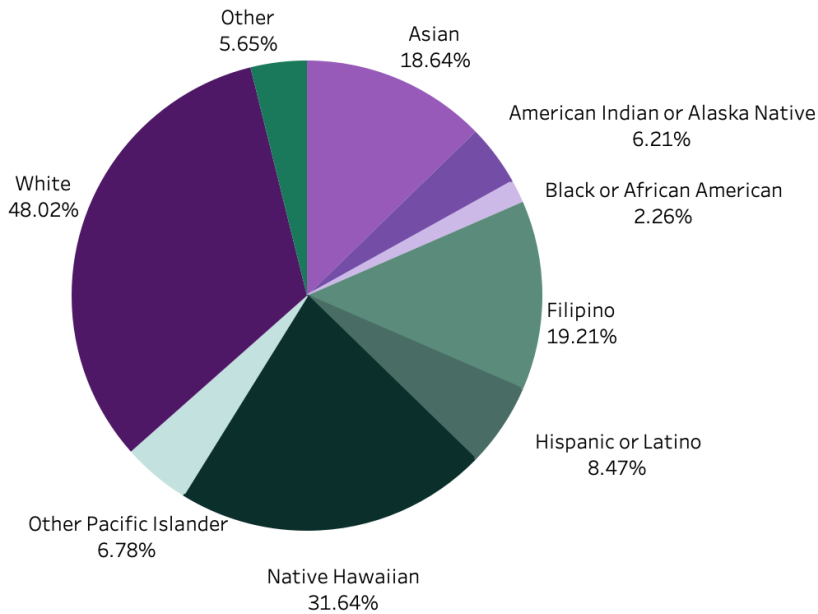
(UHM Food Insecurity Report)

*Food insecurity is when you or your household either runs out of food or money to buy food each month, or is worried about running out of food or money to buy food each month.*

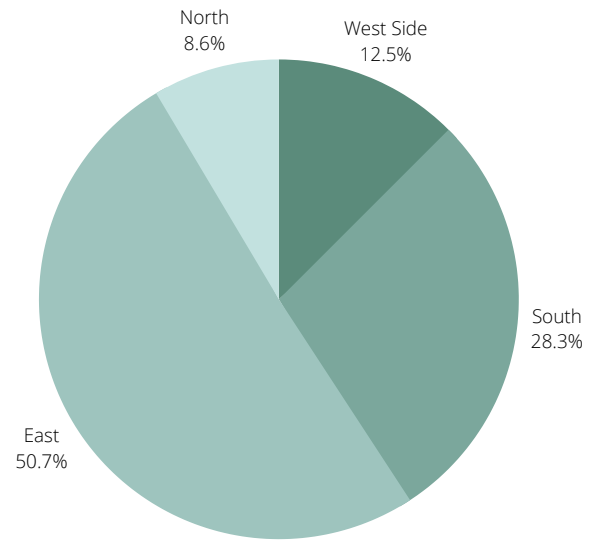
*This institution is an Equal Opportunity Provider.*

# Participant Overview

## Race / Ethnicity



## Area of Residence



## Average Household Size

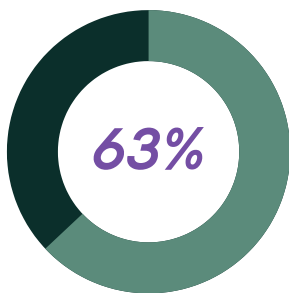


## Age of Participant



30% 34 and under  
39% 35 to 54  
31% 55+ years old

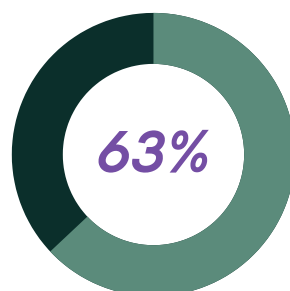
## Income



63% of households have under \$30,000 in annual income  
24% make between \$30,000-\$50,000  
13% make over \$50,000

"I only have my retirement and disability, it's not enough to pay my other bills."

## Housing Status



63% are renters  
22% own their home  
14% are houseless



# Profiles of Food Insecurity

*"Lord, help us. Our stomachs are hungry, please help. I know you're gonna come through. Until then, give me the strength to survive"*

## Food For All

"Teachers told me, one-third of the kids don't have food to eat, and it was true, if not more." Even in Jane's current predicament, she remembers and wonders about the kids she taught throughout her years teaching. She thinks of the students showing up to school just to get a meal and the kids who never had any money in their lunch accounts. Luckily, farmers and families would donate food and she could create interactive lessons mixing food preparation and life skills while feeding her class. Fruit turned into smoothies, bread, muffins, and satisfied students.

Jane is grateful for her abilities to whip up meals with anything she can find on sale or at the food bank. Her culinary skills have carried her throughout her years managing a health food store, as a teacher, a suicide prevention worker and even more so now that she's houseless and relies on a single portable burner and the hope that it won't rain while she's making her meal. She'll be 60 years old this year and has worked since she was a teenager until health and medical issues kept her from working. While she's grateful for social security, unfortunately, it's just not enough.

"The worst part is the sadness," she shares as she softly cries, "and not just for myself but for everybody." Experiencing homelessness for months at a time, she addresses the long standing stigma of drug abuse, alcoholism, and mental illness connected to the houseless community. She soberly states, she sees it in some, but not all, and regardless she feels, "every human being has a right to eat," especially on an island so fruitful and abundant as Kaua'i.

***A can of spaghetti was the only meal she had last Christmas. With her last tank of propane in storage, and no gas in her car to get it, she ate the canned spaghetti cold.***

Expired food and the same food year after year – peanut butter, Chef Boyardee, rice, and bread – amplifies her desire for shelter. She deeply misses cooking real food and enjoying real meals.

There's a resounding sorrow in her voice as she shares her feeling of "being thrown out like trash." As if her living situation reflects her place in the world and it is beneath those that have a roof over their heads and a job to go to.

Jane qualified for a meal delivery program until they made it mandatory for recipients to have a home address to deliver to. That was a big hit to her morale and she would like to see the rules change to allow houseless to receive meals.

At the onset of her medical condition her insurance covered the cost of flights to and from the hospital where she could receive care. With time after her appointment, she asked for directions to the nearest food pantry. She walked blocks until she saw the line of people waiting outside. She was astonished, the doors open for lunch Monday - Friday. Inside there were round tables and a pitcher of water in the center of every table. The pantry volunteers served hot meals and "it felt like being treated like a customer at a restaurant except if you wanted more, you could have a second helping." It was a stark contrast to her experience on Kaua'i where only one church offers hot meals twice a month in her town.

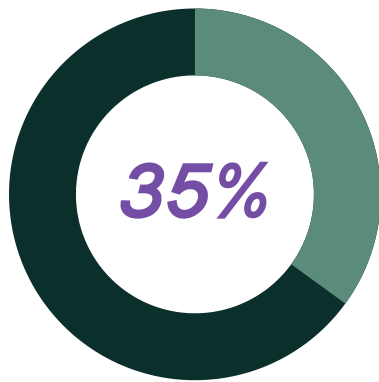
Jane's hope for Kaua'i is to see improvements in the way our agencies share food. She hopes the food being distributed is of good quality, not rotting or full of bugs that get into her other food. She hopes for safe, community gardens in every region and a small plot of land to grow food and harvest from. For herself, she hopes for housing and patiently prays her name is chosen from one of the waiting lists she's on.



# The Food Insecurity Experience

## ***Most Food Insecurity is Recent***

How long have you been food insecure?

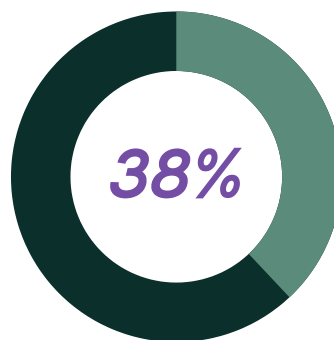


for 6 months or less  
25% for 7 to 12 months  
12% 13 to 24 months  
28% 2+ years

*"I've adapted to only eating once per day, sometimes not a 'meal' but just something to eat."*

## ***The Situation Isn't Improving for Most***

Is your food access improving or getting worse in the past few months?



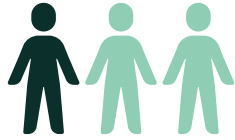
said it's about the same.

3% are now stable.  
23% said it's improving.  
24% said it's getting worse.  
12% said it's the worst it's ever been.

*"Way too much paperwork just to get turned down, so I just don't even bother anymore"*

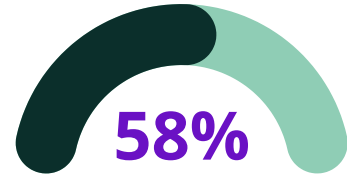
# The Food Insecurity Experience

Participating households experienced the following in the past 12 months:



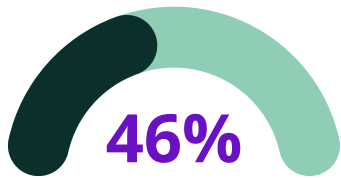
**1 in 3**

were unsure if they would have enough to eat *every week*



**58%**

missed meals at least monthly because there wasn't enough food



**46%**

were unable to provide healthy foods (ex. fresh produce) weekly



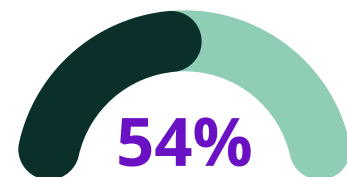
**3 in 4**

cut portion sizes monthly to make sure everyone can eat



**2 in 3**

*had to decide between buying food or paying bills monthly*



**54%**

*experienced hunger pains at least monthly*

*"It's scary to be faced with no food at all. Secondary is being forced to eat food that I normally would not eat, in order not to starve."*

*"Each day revolves around how we are going to eat and getting our next meal and what sacrifices we are going to need to make in order to eat the next day."*

# Profiles of Food Insecurity

*"An hungry man is an angry man."*

## *A Place to Grow*

As a child growing up with a garden, around lunchtime everyday Kimo's grandpa would gesture outside and tell him, "go pick what you like."

While Kimo's mom and grandma insisted on cooking what they grew, Kimo loved snacking on fresh corn, sweet vidalia onions, and juicy ripe tomatoes. Most times what he picked never made it back to the house. Instead Kimo enjoyed it right there in the bliss of an abundant garden. "Farm fresh food makes a huge difference and you can taste it."

Kimo still gardens. Growing herbs and veggies in pots, allowing himself to grow a few things in the yard but his deep seated fear of getting the dreaded call which so many Kaua'i residents seem to be getting lately, "landlord is selling the house and we gotta move" weighs heavily on his mind.

To Kimo, housing is security, and when you own your home you can grow food. Losing your home in this competitive market could mean catastrophe, especially with young children.

During the extremely tough months Kimo and his wife, a school teacher, learned to be smart – eating rice and beans so their children's bellies would be full.

Kimo always felt that despite their tough times there were always families more in need so they never visited a food pantry during the pandemic. Instead he relied on his skills as a diver, the ocean his food bank.

His friends in the fishing community were raised the old way, always sharing their catch along with a shot of chili pepper water and a great story to go along with it.

Kimo fondly remembers the generosity of one friend in particular, a big man with a big heart. Word got around that Kimo's business shut down. Kimo's friend comes to the house with bags of groceries and 3 big pots – chicken curry, beef stew, and ceviche. "The stews were still warm," Kimo shares with tears in his eyes, as if his friend just got done cooking and then came straight over thrusting the food on him, not wanting to make a big show of it. Not wanting praise or thanks. It's that kind of neighborly love that got them through the hardest times.

***"I wanna see everyone eating, having a decent meal, especially the keiki."***

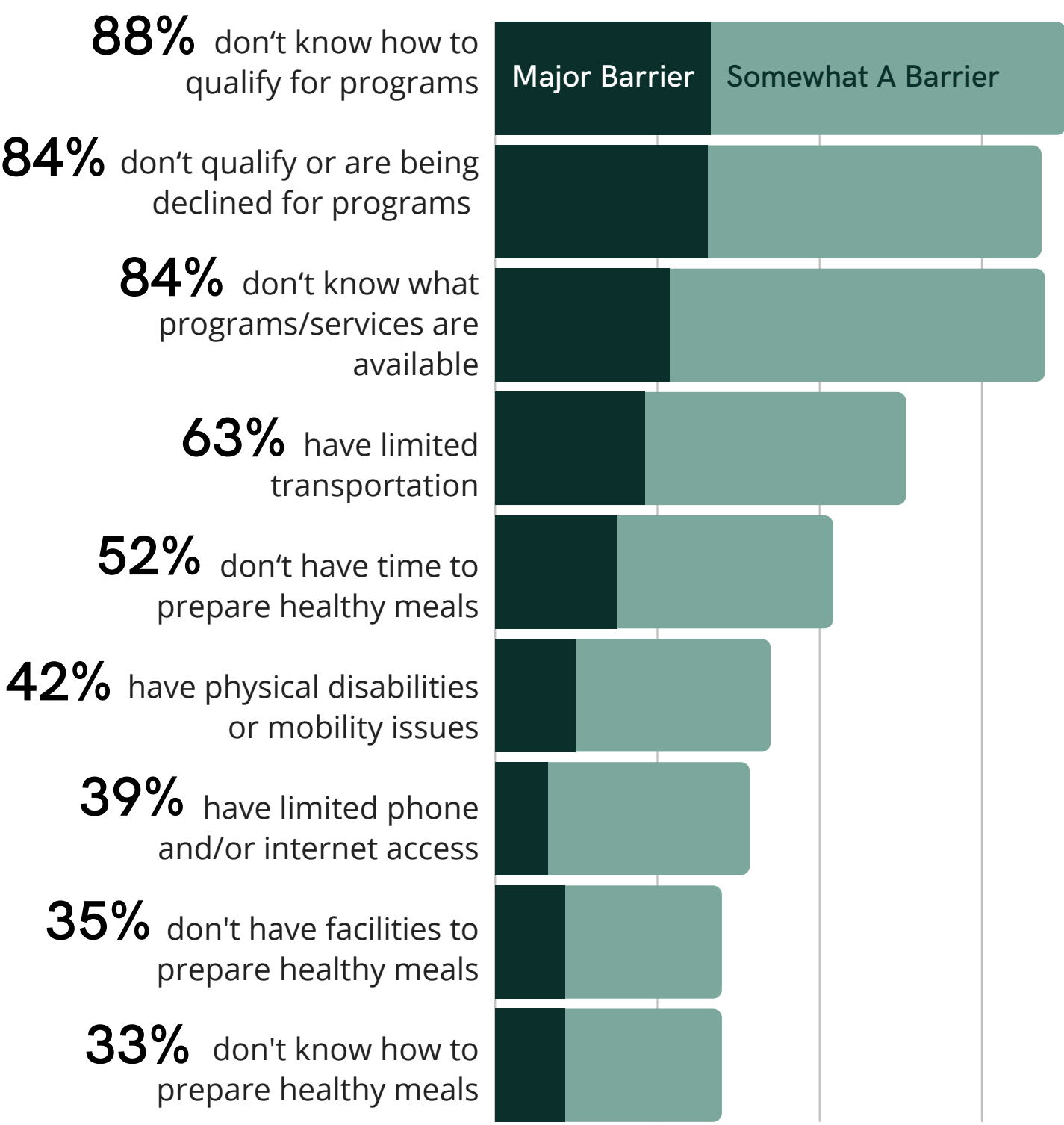
Sharing abundance is a perfect way to offset food insecurity and community gardens could make a huge difference in people's lives. Once folks understand the garden is open to all, that they don't have to steal to eat, community gardening could provide resources easily accessible to those with limited know-how or farming abilities.

Learning how to grow food was at the top of Kimo's list for a more food secure Kaua'i right alongside learning how to tap into the island's other resources like fishing and hunting safely and always with respect. He also hopes for affordable housing, allowing longtime residents a chance at really setting down roots.



# Health & Food Insecurity

% of households that struggled with the following barriers to accessing and consuming healthy food, such as fruits and vegetables



*"We are at a place where we are content because we are used to it, but for our future health, I know it will be greatly impacted"*

*"We have health issues that eating more vegetables and protein would help with but cost is so high and carbs are cheaper, keeps you from having hunger pains."*

# Profiles of Food Insecurity

## "Come Eat, Come Eat"

Kanoe speaks of the love of God and family. With those two things she has been able to escape abusive living conditions and find a small, safe home in the uplands of Kaua'i. Born and raised in Honolulu, she misses the convenience of city living but is grateful for her daughter who comes to visit, talk story, cook meals, and help her clean her tiny home.

Kanoe is 80 years old and can no longer drive, per doctors orders. She has a number of illnesses and needs assistance when riding the paratransit and going grocery shopping.

Living on a tight budget from social security, sometimes she would be at the register without enough money to buy all of her groceries. She would then have to put things back while those waiting in line behind her watched.

While her food security has improved since the pandemic, during the months of quarantine, Kanoe would regularly ration her food to make it last and "eat lots of PB&J sandwiches."

The church occasionally dropped off fresh fruits and vegetables which she enjoyed because she values her independence and preparing her own meals. But sometimes her health wouldn't allow it.

She tried meals from a service agency but shares in all seriousness, "I think they make those meals for kūpuna with no teeth. The vegetables all mushy."

Kanoe would like to see more assistance for kūpuna. She expresses, "there's a lot of seniors out there that don't get the help they should get."

It may not be easy breaking down the barriers because most kūpuna refuse help, but she encourages folks to spend the time to get to know their elders, talk story, and build their trust. Offer to share what you have in an easy manner and "show you care for them."

Growing up, Kanoe remembers kids playing in the yard with other neighborhood kids. No matter who was there, when it was time to eat, everyone was called in for dinner. "Come eat, come eat" was the common phrase and no one was turned away.

Kanoe hopes to see families taking care of each other more and reclaiming our Aloha Spirit. She hopes our younger generation steps up to the plate and when they see people who need help to offer them help.

*We asked participants:*

*"How does your food insecurity make you feel?"*



# Solutions for the Future

## Provide Food Plants & Space to Grow



95% of participants were interested in growing their own food.

Out of these, only 61% had space to do so - 23% had space for potted plants only; and 38% had space for in-ground and potted plants.

Community gardens frequently came up as desired in comments.

## Healthier Food Matters



Many participants shared that they want to eat healthy food, including fruits and vegetables, but felt they can't afford to. A large portion of participants had concerns about their health related to their diet, including many with diet-related diseases.

Actionable requests included that food pantries carry more fresh produce and more farmers markets accepted SNAP/EBT.



## Rebranding Charity vs. Sharing

Many participants shared that they were too embarrassed or ashamed to go to food banks and food pantries because they didn't want their neighbors and friends to know.

Sharing abundance is Hawai'i style but accepting charity can be difficult for people. Creating fun events that share food, offering home delivery, reducing paperwork, and adjusting the messaging of offers may help to better reach those who feel this way.



## Follow the Foodstamps

When asked which programs participants were aware of and applied for, SNAP/EBT ranked #1.

46% of participants use SNAP, while 27% reported that they applied for SNAP but were denied. Many mentioned in comments that they would like to see the eligibility threshold changed to allow more to qualify for benefits.

The DA BUX program, which doubles the value of SNAP, needs more marketing. Only 28% of participants used DA BUX and 40% of respondents had never heard of the program.



# Solutions for the Future

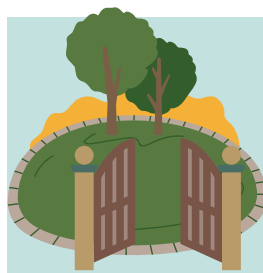
## Utilize In-Person & Online Social Networks for Outreach



84% of participants weren't aware of programs that may be available to them and 88% didn't know how to qualify for them. Participants shared how they found out about food access programs and services.

The top program referral sources included: Friends (29%), Social Media (22.7%), & Food Bank/Pantry (21.8%). Magazines, Newspapers, Healthcare Offices, Social Workers, and Schools were ranked very low (<8%).

## Improve Neighborhood Access

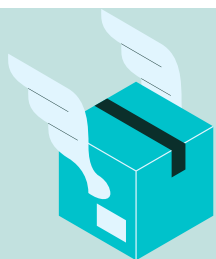


When asked what changes in their neighborhood or community would help them to get enough healthy food to eat, participants frequently suggested community gardens, access to land, and more accessible markets and pantries (locations, hours, etc.).



## Provide Direct Food Access Over Nutrition Education

There was a strong preference indicated for direct food access and information on becoming eligible for programs that provided it. There was much less interest in and/or need for nutrition education, like cooking classes and recipe cards.



## Offer More Flexible Programming

Programs that provided delivery and/or let participants choose their own foods were the most beneficial.

Mālama Kaua'i's SNAP/DA BUX program (88%), SNAP benefits (87%), and Hawai'i Foodbank's senior programs (77%) ranked highest for being the most helpful programs.

Less direct resources, including referrals and case management services (68%), food pantry pickups (68%), free plant material giveaways (67%), and TANF (67%) ranked lowest.

## Involve the Food Insecure in Program Planning



48.7% of participants were willing to engage in ongoing surveys or focus groups if some form of compensation were provided for their time.

# Next Steps

## 2030 Kaua'i Food Access Plan

These findings are part of the development of a multi-agency, islandwide food access plan. Activities and progress towards this plan have included:

- Farm to School stakeholder meetings convened from 2018 to 2020.
- Quarterly Food Access Meetings held since May 2021, bringing key food access agencies and organizations together for increased communication, collaboration, and planning around food access.
- Farmer focus groups have been held in 2020 and 2021, with an upcoming 2022 session.

The next steps in this process include needs assessments and Food Access Micro-Summits to occur in the fall/winter 2022-2023, culminating with the release of a food access plan in early 2023.

To stay informed and get involved in this work, please contact: Food Access Coordinator, Stormy Soza, at [stormy@malamakauai.org](mailto:stormy@malamakauai.org) | (808) 828-0685 x11

## Mahalo

*Thank you to all of the agencies and partners who supported this work.*

Agency on Elderly Affairs

All Angels Loaves and Fishes

Aloha 'Āina Poi Co.

Calvary Chapel

Child & Family Services

County of Kaua'i

'Ele'ele Baptist Church

Hawai'i Dept. of Health, SNAP-Ed

Hawai'i Foodbank, Kaua'i Branch

Hawai'i Pacific Health

Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities

Hale 'Ohana Housing

Holy Cross Church

Hō'ola Lāhui Health

Ho'okipa Kaua'i Food Pantry

INPEACE

Kapa'a Missionary Church

Kalepa Village

Kaniko'o Rice Camp

Kaua'i Bible Church

Kaua'i Community College ECED Program

Kaua'i District Health Office

Kaua'i Economic Opportunity

Kolopua Apartments

Kūmano I Ke Ala

Kūpuna Food Security Coalition

Līhu'e Town Courts

Partners in Development Foundation

North Shore Food Pantry

Office of Economic Development

Salvation Army

St. Catherine Parish

St. Raphael Church

St. William Church

Westside Christian Center

Women, Infant, & Children

Women in Need

*And all of the wonderful donors who sponsor produce bags for those in need at [KauaiLocalFood.com](http://KauaiLocalFood.com).*