For Immediate Release

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Spring tours and tastings at school gardens

KAMUELA, Hawai‘i—March 19, 2012—School gardens around Hawai‘i Island are in full bloom, and students and teachers at several school gardens are opening their gates for tours and tastings in April. On these tours, the public can enjoy produce grown and prepared by the students, teachers, and volunteers, and see how food self-reliance is growing in our communities.

The tours will be April 14, 21, and 28, and are hosted by The Kohala Center, a local non-profit with an emphasis on education, environment, and empowerment. Lunch is offered on some of the tours.

The nationwide renaissance of school gardens has not bypassed Hawai‘i, where 85 percent of the food is imported. Sixty-three public, public charter, and private schools are growing gardens and integrating them in many ways, from curriculum to waste reduction. Students, from elementary to high school, engage in hands-on, project-based education, and learn garden-based math, language arts, science, nutrition, and, in some instances, cooking.

“The work these students are engaged in is impressive and inspiring,” said Nancy Redfeather of The Kohala Center and the Hawai‘i Island School Garden Network (HISGN) project director. “Many schools are developing vermicomposting, aquaponic, and zero-waste programs in addition to their gardens. It’s amazing what these communities are doing.”

While some gardens are on school property, others are off-site, such as Hua O Ke Ao at the Amy B.H. Greenwell Ethnobotanical Garden, one of the gardens available to tour.

“Our site, Hua O Ke Ao, offers 15 acres of rich agricultural history of Kona and is well developed with hundreds of native Hawaiian plant species,” said Kamuela Naihe, garden coordinator. “Our purpose is to make traditional agricultural and native plant conservation education available to interested youth and their families while meeting different community needs.”

This school year, Hua O Ke Ao is open to 20 students in grades 4–12 from four area schools who are learning to grow, tend, and prepare foods such as dryland kalo (taro) and ʻuala (sweet potatoes). The garden also assists in seed collection and propagation of different plant species, some of which are endemic and endangered.
“I’ve tried many different types of kalo because of working in the Hua O Ke Ao garden,” said Jayci Gomes, a seventh grader. “This program is not only a place where trees grow, it is a garden where different types of people come to grow with the āina and grow as people.”

Since 2007, The Kohala Center has supported HISGN by helping schools identify and secure funding, and by assisting in the development of volunteer and professional training programs to help these school gardens succeed.

“Many of these students have very little personal experience with food production, though some fish and hunt,” said Donna Mitts, school garden coordinator at Paauilo Elementary and Intermediate School. “Through this program, they and their families learn skills they can use at home to grow fresh food and get different ideas on how to prepare it.”

School garden coordinators, and in some cases the students, will be leading these free, hour-long tours to showcase their produce and knowledge of cultivating food. No reservations are required.

Two tours on Saturday, April 21, and one on Saturday, April 28, will include lunch prepared with locally grown produce. Lunches are $15; free for members of The Kohala Center Circle of Friends and a guest. For lunch reservations contact Cortney Hoffman at The Kohala Center, choffman@kohalacenter.org or (808) 887-6411. Space is limited.

Pick a date, select your region, join a tour, and sign up for lunch.

Tours on Saturday, April 14, include:
• West Hawaii—Hualalai Academy, 9–10 a.m., and Innovations Public Charter School, 10:30–11:30 a.m.
• Hamakua—Honokaa High School, 9–10 a.m.; Paauilo Elementary and Intermediate School, 10:15–10:45 a.m., and Laupahoehoe High and Elementary School, 11:15–12:15 p.m.

Tours on Saturday, April 21, include:
• West Hawaii—Honaunau Elementary School, 9–10 a.m.; Kona Pacific Public Charter School, 10:30–11:30 a.m., and Hua O Ke Ao at Amy B.H. Greenwell Ethnobotanical Garden, noon to 1 p.m. followed by lunch from 1–2 p.m. Lunch reservations required, $15 per person.
• East Hawaii—Hawaii Academy of Arts and Sciences Public Charter School, 9–10 a.m.; Dragon’s Eye Learning Center, 10:30–11:30 a.m., and Kua O Ka La Public Charter School, noon to 12:45 p.m. followed by lunch from 1–2 p.m. Lunch reservations required; $15 per person.

Tours on Saturday, April 28, include:
• East Hawaii—Hilo High School, 9–10 a.m., and Lanakila Learning Center, 10:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
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- Waimea—Waimea Country School, 9:30–10:30 a.m., and Malaai Culinary Garden of Waimea Middle School, 10:45 a.m. to noon followed by lunch from noon to 1 p.m. Lunch reservations required; $15 per person.

A complete list with dates and descriptions of the tours is available at http://www.kohalacenter.org/TKCMemberEvents12/about.html. To learn more about becoming a Kohala Center Circle of Friends member, visit http://www.kohalacenter.org/signmeup.html or call (808) 887-6411.

Sophie Smith of Hawaii Academy of Arts and Sciences Public Charter School and her fresh chard harvest.