New Farmer Training Symposium

Statewide representatives of New Farmer Training programs met on May 27, 2014, on Hawaii Island to share their experiences and practices for practical agricultural training. Discussions were focused on developing new commercial farmers and on providing both the academic and hands on knowledge needed to sustain an ongoing farm business.

New Farmer Program Summaries

Kohala Center’s Ku I Ka Mana is in its 3rd cohort of 10-16 new farm families. Most participants had a place to farm already or were trying to qualify for Hamakua Co-op lands. They are just getting up and running with their teaching farm location near Honoka’a and have developed a mentor’s network to get new farmers connected with practicing farmer mentors in the region. They partner with SBDC, UHH, UHM, Ag Incubator etc for teachers and curriculum. Kohala Center also has a high school ag mentoring program funded in part by Kamehameha Schools (KE) that is based in Honoka’a and draws students from N & E Hawaii. This is more about exposing students to ag than training for essential ag skills.

GoFarm Hawaii, Agribusiness Incubator Program partners with CTAHR, Leeward CC, Windward CC, Kohala Center and others to serve working and non-working adults. They are funded by C3T funds from the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations and get additional support from KS and Ulupono. The focus is on commercial farmers and entrepreneurs. Student preference is for organic programs but they are not limited to that approach. They focus on science and business-based curriculum and have begun generating distance learning programs to capture lessons and make them more broadly available. They have trained 30 participants at Leeward and Kauai and 75 at their Windward program. A key strength is that GoFarm has developed a reasonable brand for their efforts that gives them some strength in the funding and policy making world. Funding, and a short supply of farmer mentors, are key issues for GoFarm going forward.

David Fuertes, North Kohala: Efforts in North Kohala are in their 9th year. Two separate non-profit efforts, one focused on high school and post high school students, the other with local families producing taro in a cooperative fashion. Student programs focus on leadership, hands on learning, and self esteem. Family programs focus on origins, values, purpose and destiny. They partner with CAFNRM, Kohala Center, the County and others. Some funding comes from the USDA. They have a base to operate at Kohala High School and another for natural farming and taro production near Hawi. Their efforts reinforce a community goal to be 50% food self sufficient by 2020. One challenge is getting families to actually make a business from their taro production. Most of it is given away in the community for events and to support families.
**UH Maui campus:** They offer an Ag Certificate program and a bridge program in the summer semester for youth orientation to ag. They also offer food safety training and organic certification training. They have more mentors than they have students and need to do more to integrate with other UH Maui programs like their culinary institute. There is strong interest on Maui to develop new farmers. Land availability for farmers is a challenge.

**Small Business Development Corp (SBDC)** serves farmers and other small businesses. They are often tapped to provide financial and business training to new farmer programs as part of a broader ag curriculum.

**Kamehameha Schools** has an ag strategic plan that includes an effort to grow new farmers and to make their land available for productive farming. They will lease land to new farmers with up to a 5-year term to allow farmers to prove their ability to farm economically and responsibly. KS sets stewardship standards for their farmers and have weeded out some who do not comply. KS has a competitive program to solicit ag business plans and to award a limited number of leases with no early costs and provide capital to help encourage new farm efforts on their lands statewide.

**Pacific Gateway Center** is a non-profit based in Honolulu that serves immigrants, many of which may have been subject to labor abuse from agricultural contractors. They have a 60-acre farm in Kunia, where immigrants get access to farm lands, and a commercial kitchen to support value added processing. They have a long waiting list. They are looking to expand their farming program to the North Shore and to Hawaii Island. PGC’s challenges include a range of communication skills, multiple languages, and finding a category to fit into for government assistance programs. Farmers and their families can be very committed to sustaining farming efforts but gaining trust is an ongoing challenge. PGC’s programs teach financial planning, food safety, soil conservation, etc. They partner with HARC, Hawaii Community Foundation, CTAHR and are looking for USDA funding support to expand their programs.

**College of Tropical Agriculture and Hunan Resources (CTAHR)** offers a variety of training and extension services to both new and established farmers. Their mission is to focus on Research, Extension and Education. They are now offering certificate programs in sustainable ag and aquaculture and have a focus on value added skills to build product demand. Their key limitations include flat funding and the loss of long-term staff. CTAHR’s staff is often called on to teach classes in various new farmer training programs. They also run the Master Gardener program that trains gardening expertise and develops a cohort of experts to address crop and plant questions from the community. CTAHR also provides staff to support the 4H programs in the state. These are largely livestock programs and they teach leadership, STEM, healthy living etc. using volunteers and tapping into existing ag networks. CTAHR has a network of experiment stations in varying degrees of operation. Some of these sites (like Waimanalo) are used for new farmer training.
UH Hilo College of Agriculture, Forestry, & Natural Resource Management (CAFNRM) offers an agricultural degree program with five areas of specialization (animal science, aquaculture, pre-veterinary science, tropical plant science & agro-ecology, and tropical horticulture), three certificate programs that take a year to complete (forestry, plant tissue culture, and tropical farming), and faculty expertise to address ag issues and opportunities. They are developing new programs in ag engineering and agribusiness (with the College of Business and Economics), and operate a 110 acre research and practice farm in Panaewa. They will be offering a livestock management course next year that will focus on ranching and livestock management skills as a hands-on class. The CAFNRM is presently constrained by the loss of several key faculty and support staff positions and severe constraints in operational funding.

Hawaii County Dept of R&D provides partial funding for a small number of farmer training programs as part of their annual competitive grant program. Funding is mainly to assist in program start up and isn’t intended to be a sustained source of funds. The focus is on programs that intend to develop new commercial farmers as opposed to community gardening. R&D’s role is to help coordinate efforts and to advocate and dispense information that is of value to the ag community.

Farming for the Working Class is a training program for DHHL ag lessees in Waimea that involves the construction of green houses and training on various crops and business skills to support homesteaders in developing supplemental ag incomes. Initial efforts have been supported by OHA, the State, County and several foundations. Initial results are promising with many participants actively producing in the green houses and some looking to expand. The Homesteaders Association has also launched an ambitious effort to develop and area of DHHL land for a concentration of greenhouses with a central processing facility. This project, referred to as Waimea Nui, received state support in the amount of nearly $4M in the last legislative session. They are looking for additional funds to construct a central farm products processing center and to produce a micro-grid to meet energy needs. This green house model is expensive up front but provides a way to help small producers avoid some of the issues that go with outside crop production. Crops grown by existing new farmers include various tomatoes, cucumbers, beans and an assortment of flower.

HCC Non Credit and Credit classes are offered every semester. Students are not generally degree oriented but rather looking for a basic foundation in agricultural production theory and strategic skills to develop a successful farm. Some of the non-credit classes are funded by C3T funds that will run out shortly. HCC programs are less academically oriented and may be most useful to emerging farmers looking for a specific set of knowledge or skills and not a professional degree.

Moloka‘i New Farmers Program CTAHR operates an ongoing new farmer training program aimed at Native Hawaiian and other farmers on Molokai. Extension Agent Glenn Teves has
provided a consistent and well-regarded support network for new and continuing farmers on Molokai. Glenn provided a thoughtful email in lieu of his attendance with points such as:

- New Farmer training programs take a team approach of teachers, mentors and counselors.
- Sometimes not deciding to farm is the best decision some new farmers can make, as farming is not for everybody.
- Program has to be hands on and not too academic.
- Ability to run a business is as important as the ability to farm.
- An historical archive of Glenn’s newsletter for new farmers on Molokai can be found at http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/sustainag/NewFarmer/newsletters.asp

Future needs identified

- Need for sustained funding to keep training programs going.
- Need to fund mentoring programs that link new farmers to practical experience.
- Development of distance learning curriculums to give farmers any-time access to relevant production and management information.
- Development of a program brand to sharpen identity and external recognition.
- Availability of land for new farmers to farm is an ongoing issue. Farm training programs need sustained land bases to effectively function.
- Relationships and partnerships with key farmers, markets and support agencies are essential and need to be part of all trainings.
- Need for a menu of programs to meet diverse farmer training requirements and link to accommodate community initiatives and regional opportunities.
- K-12 programs like School Gardens, 4H and DOE ag programs play a critical role in helping to engage youth to learn about ag and appreciate food, and to get parents involved as well. These are generally not farmer training programs.
- Building entrepreneurial skills should be a key piece of all farmer training programs.
- Improving and unifying the legislative voice for Agriculture is much needed.
- Regional processing options (packing, washing etc.) are needed but needs vary by crop, region and farm community.
- Getting lease, loan or cooperative access to farm equipment for start up farmers is important.
- Access to capital to grow farm operations is a challenge. Need microloans and broader financial community commitment for new ag producers.
- Several of the participants indicated a need to provide farmer trainees better information on plant health problem identification, alternative soil amendments, microbial inoculants, biofertilizers, biopesticides, and integrated/semi-organic approaches to production.
- USDA PBARC is planning to partner with UHH CAFNRM in the years ahead to specifically address sustainable East Hawaii orchard cropping systems and this includes re-
search on soil health using alternative methods as they relate to soil fertility and pest control, and the evaluation of new germplasm.

Resources for New Farmers

- CTAHR Sustainable and Organic Program Website: http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/sustainag/NewFarmer/index.html
- HISustainAg’s YouTube channel: http://www.youtube.com/user/HIsustainAg

Representative Richard Onishi has been the Vice-Chair of the House Agriculture committee. His active participation was most helpful in this symposium. He indicated that agriculture has a difficult road in the legislature. Few elected people come from ag backgrounds and there have been some disparate voices advocating for ag issues that are too often in conflict with one another. This confounds clear progress and good decision making. There is a need for a broader vision for ag and a consolidated initiative to support new farmer training and public investment. Each program advocating for its own individual needs can result in no one getting what they want in the end.

The New Farmer Training Symposium was co-sponsored by the University of Hawaii at Hilo, CAFNRM and the County of Hawaii Dept of R&D.