

**Sustainable Agriculture Skill Panel Forum**  
**December 14, 2011**  
**Enhancing and Increasing Opportunities for Farmers and Farm Workers**

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**Discussion Outline:**

- I. Introductions: Why are we here?
- II. Setting the Context Discussion:
  - a. What is the current state of communication between educational entities and the agricultural industry on enhancing and increasing opportunities for Farmers and Farm Workers?
  - b. What is the current state of labor and labor shortages affecting Farmers and Farm Workers?
  - c. From the perspective of Farmers and Farm Workers what is needed for the growth of the agriculture industry?
- III. Preferred Vision in 10-20 Years
- IV. Develop Priorities
  - a. What are the opportunities or supporting forces that will move us closer to our best case scenario/vision?
  - b. What are the barriers or restraints that hold us back from moving closer to our best case scenario/vision?
- V. Outline Actions for Priorities (time permitting)

**I. Introductions: Why are we here?**

Not recorded

**II. Setting the Context Discussion**

***What is the current state of communication between educational entities and the agricultural industry on enhancing and increasing opportunities for Farmers and Farm Workers?***

- Higher education objective = preparing management and marketing staff. Different levels needed of training, with different exit points in K-20 education pipeline. The goal is connecting training needs with workforce needs. Expand opportunities for people educated in community colleges and universities.
- 80% of the time on ranch is labor, even for “working manager.” There needs to be an understanding that labor is often a part of the job, regardless.
- For the “working manager,” what content and critical thinking skills are needed? They need to know how to motivate and supervise others.
- On small farms, all workers need a range of skills

- More formal/networked relationships are needed between farms and education sector. Right now it's largely informal.
- Lacking connection with K-12/DOE to start the education and knowledge base early. Need K-12 coordinator positions. Awareness of need from PK on.
- Where do kids who begin pathway in Agriculture during PK-12 go? There's a gap.
- Agility (like other sectors) is needed. Project management approach with best practice analysis is needed. Farming requires such a range of skills. Education system can't support all the individual niches.
- Need to connect with Farmers to better understand workforce development needs, connect students with mentors
- There are regional differences across the state
- Extension courses: there is a lack of language skills to teach farm staff that don't speak English.
- Farmers have a very narrow margin and need business consulting and research that takes that into account
- Farms need ways to increase efficiency so they can increase productivity and raise wages.
- Need independent contractors that can help increase productivity—workers staying on task
- Students are not associating education with agriculture. Increase mentorship/internships. Farmers with expertise not connecting with future farmers.
- Apprenticeship program needed—partnership between farmers and education sector.
- "ETF" funding available to provide QuickBooks training and other practical application training.
- We know mentorship is important. Is funding available to pay farmers for their time in training and mentoring students? "Free labor" is not enough, since students are inexperienced.
- Develop option to better serve farms/farmers. "On the Job" program to pay 50% of salary. Federal grant for short term. 90% of salary cost can be reimbursed. Need to increase communication about resources available, and make a better match between needs and resources.
- Few agriculture workers are local, most are immigrant workers. Jobs need to be marketed better to increase local worker population. Need better incentives.
- How can agriculture sector increase the DOE focus on the sector for meaningful growth? Students do not have a positive association with agriculture. Need to make Ag "sexy."
- Has there been communication about the \$24 million federal grant for Hawaii through the community colleges?
  - The grant mostly questioned "bioneers" and others on needed soft skills. Survey was focused on a certain level.
  - The agriculture portion of the grant did not have a lot of connection with farmers, and not a lot of contact with other islands. There was a compressed timeline. Next step is to rewrite sections after grant director is hired, and involve agriculture industry. \$7 million total for agriculture.

## ***What is the current state of labor and labor shortages affecting Farmers and Farm Workers?***

- Fundamental change needed in how agriculture sector jobs are perceived –right now it’s taboo to work in ag. Seasonal nature of the work is also a big challenge.
- At least there is a year-round growing season in Hawaii. Can diversify.
- Short-term/long-term. In short term, there’s the \$7 million for agriculture out of the \$24 million grant. Can farmers use community college students on a seasonal basis?
  - There’s a difference between teaching future workers and reaching farm’s productivity level needs. Need to pay farmers to teach.
  - Time is as valuable as money for a farmer. That’s a barrier to training labor. How can you create a win-win?
  - Need to develop a program that assists farms in paying for training system.
- What do farmworkers need to support a family? A social service package is needed for farmworkers. It takes \$54,000 to support a family of 4 for a year on the Big Island. Farmworkers are making \$40,000, maximum. Need a social service package that is helping to pay for housing, transportation, health, childcare, and other costs.
- Can farmers shift perspective on paying a higher wage for higher quality worker?
  - Need consumers willing to pay at a level to support those farmer decisions to pay fair, sustainable wage.
  - Need help building multiple marketing models: CSA, farmers markets, etc.
- Need infrastructure. There is no ag infrastructure in Hawaii to help with pricing, managing increased costs, educating consumers about cost of imports in the long term.
- Need to facilitate farmers coming together and joining forces (cooperatives)
- The job has no vacations and an unpredictable schedule. So many things are out of the farm’s control
- Need to move to more high-tech models. Greenhouses, productivity monitoring, etc.
- Infrastructure is key to assist the industry as a whole
- Need to educate K-12 students as future consumers, not just potential future workers.
- Rural perspective: not a lot of opportunity. Kids are dropping out or at risk that are willing to work hard if they have a connection to something important. 40% to 50% dropout rates in some rural areas. The kids want to work, want a sense of identity, connection. There’s a huge gap now, needs to be a grassroots effort and a K-12 effort.

## **From the perspective of Farmers and Farm Workers what is needed for the growth of the agriculture industry?**

- “50% and pass on” People/Farmers are not sharing their knowledge because of competition or perceived lack of interest in ag learning. Natural science/conservation practice is a way to develop interest in ag. Keep and preserve your land in sustainable way and maintain profitability.
- Teacher training and Professional development. Can tap into this to provide labor?
- Waimea example

- For growing the industry, it's not a labor issue, it's a productivity issue. Farmers are not as productive as they could be. Farmers are using methods from twenty years ago, many farmers are at retirement age. Need to introduce technology, greenhouses, things that take some of the variability out of farming.

### III. Preferred Vision in 10-20 Years

#### ***What is the best-case scenario for growing the workforce among farmers and farm workers?***

- Focus on “Local food for local consumption”. Has a lot of direct/indirect benefits. It's a low hanging fruit. Tie concepts of malama, stewardship, and ecological benefit into workforce development, and eliminate risks for workers and their children.
- Focus on the incentive for farmworkers. How can farmworkers make a living wage?
- Perception changes: farmers go from “blue collar” to “green collar” workers.
- There are profitable crop models for diversified agriculture
- Focus on native/endangered plants (koa, kauli, wiliwili—retirement crops)
- Leverage high skilled/experienced veterans to fill agriculture shortage of workers (comes with tax incentives and training funding)
- Hawaii has a limited number of young farmers, limited number of types of crops grown, and limited number of crops where we displaced imports. In 20 years, I'd like to see:
  - 20 new, established rich farmers under 50
  - 20 new, established local grown crops
  - 20 crops where we displaced imports
- Changes in the business and regulatory environments. Even with education, we still need a viable income and industry.
- All the food produced in nation is equally divided between corporate farms, family farms and “weekend farmers.” Need to have clear support for all three sectors and have a strategy with room for everyone and options for all.
- Culture and values are embedded in education and our practices. There's a Hawaii focus.
- Producers are in the conversation—make it easy on them to know resources that are available.
- People coming through the pipeline have two paths: 1) entrepreneurial, and 2) more profitable farms
- Educated retailers: Majority now are mainland chains with “bang for the buck” mentality. Need to incentivize retailers to support local farms, because buying local is not their priority now. Shopper is providing any incentive now.
- Farm set up/start up best practices program is available. “Incubator program”. Need start up money of at least \$40,000 and technical experience. Can profitable farms get coaching to incorporate higher-paying/high-tech crops?
- Innovating “niche crops” (like ulu flour)
- Protecting “local grown” label

- Focusing PK-12 education to develop future consumers and workers for sustainable agriculture.
  - Vocational programs like FFA and 4H still exist and need help
- There is continuing education so that the attitude as teachers, professionals, community is that agriculture is a great, viable area to work in.
- There are entry options for people that want to own their farms. They are paired with farmer mentors. Government role is to provide funding and loans.
- We've stopped using the term "vocational," changed to "technical." Agriculture education is included in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math). In DOE, CTE versus Science/STEM pathway. Need to involve DOE in making this change. For farms to be productive, issue is needing technology, and the next generation of farming is going to be STEM related.

#### IV. Develop Priorities

<i>What are the <b>opportunities or supporting forces</b> that will move us closer to our best case scenario/vision?</i>	<i>What are the <b>barriers or restraints</b> that hold us back from moving closer to our best case scenario/vision?</i>
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#### **Support and involve youth in agriculture (16 votes)**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people—there is energy, ability, and community support</li> <li>• Formation of HI Farm to School and School Garden Hui, creation of HI Environmental Literacy Plan, Hawaii Environmental Education Alliance (HEEA) has re-formed</li> <li>• Hawaii DOE--Career pathways/academies can be leveraged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people not involved enough in generating solutions</li> <li>• New generation is more interested in technology, not working outdoors</li> </ul>
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#### **Economics: constraints (12 votes)**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ag land IS available and not utilized</li> <li>• Pockets in Hawaii with lower land costs and high unemployment where opportunity exists for win-win pairing</li> <li>• Rising fuel costs making it more competitive to grow local</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economics: Farming is a low margin/high risk business. Health care, costs, all an issue</li> <li>• Access to capital—small loans</li> <li>• High costs keep farms from being competitive (fuel, labor, feed)</li> <li>• Feed options are limited, especially for organic options. Need alternatives that are local, diverse, inexpensive—corn byproducts?</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farm worker wages are too low— need “social services” /safety net package to help with transportation, education, health, housing, child care, etc. Shared resources needed to make this possible. Social networks brought to agriculture community.</li> <li>• Land speculation by developers</li> </ul>
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**Resources for farmers (11 votes)**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UH Extension service and HARC</li> <li>• Growth and Diversity of marketing models (web, farmers markets, ESA, farm to table, value added, and traditional)</li> <li>• Giant Department of Labor grant to try some ideas out in the near term. Federal \$ to support diversified/non-traditional agriculture</li> <li>• Increased collaboration across state departments and federal departments</li> <li>• NRCS (national resource) provides wonderful/helpful support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UH Extension is understaffed and needs more resources. Uneven performance</li> <li>• Agriculture research stations— understaffed and facilities are in need of repair</li> <li>• “Old practices” are important and need to be learned and “new/high tech” practices are important. The transition needs to be managed between philosophies and capacities/skills</li> <li>• Inadequate infrastructure (water facility) facilities (cooling, storing, processing, packing) services (soil testing), supply services.</li> <li>• Access to capital—small loans</li> <li>• Small farms connecting to resources is difficult: awareness, access, and timing</li> <li>• Feed options are limited, especially for organic options. Need alternatives that are local, diverse, inexpensive—corn byproducts?</li> <li>• Need rotating labor pool, collaboratively synch up growing seasons and farming needs</li> <li>• Pests—here already, constantly arriving, impacting directly/indirectly</li> </ul>
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Regulations—navigating and supporting reform (9 votes)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field labor, food safety</li> <li>• Hawaii Land lease policy, regulations in general, capital investment is substantial to start and/or continue operations. Land owner is not always the operator</li> <li>• Federal and state regulations are challenging, particularly for small/family farms. Also for immigrant labor</li> <li>• Permitting process unfriendly to small farms</li> </ul>
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Workforce skills development (9 votes)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seed corn companies are providing work opportunities—Hawaii has an ideal growing season</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and safety regulations</li> <li>• Business skills, skill development in ag for technical/business side, language skills</li> <li>• Cultural differences, generational differences</li> </ul>
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Attitude and perceptions about agriculture and the workforce (6 votes)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shift in attitude/perceptions does exist. We can build on a rising tide of public understanding of the importance of local food production and agriculture, and working in agriculture.</li> <li>• Sustainability is becoming part of the mainstream culture/embraced</li> <li>• Critical mass across sectors of people who want change. Huis and collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Old attitudes about agriculture and the lack of diversity in job tasks</li> <li>• How we frame the issue and acknowledge the complexity and need for a sustainable fix</li> <li>• Need rotating labor pool, collaboratively synch up growing seasons and farming needs</li> </ul>
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Support for farmworker families (3 votes)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmworker wages are too low—need “social services” /safety net package to help with transportation, education, health, housing, child care, etc. Shared resources needed to make this possible. Social</li> </ul>
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	networks brought to agriculture community.
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Collaborations and partnerships, both across sectors and within sectors (2 votes)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of HI Farm to School and School Garden Hui, creation of HI Environmental Literacy Plan, Hawaii Environmental Education Alliance (HEEA) has re-formed</li> <li>• Pockets in Hawaii with lower land costs and high unemployment where opportunity exists for win-win pairing</li> <li>• Critical mass across sectors of people who want change. Huis and collaboration</li> <li>• Increased collaboration across state departments and federal departments</li> <li>• Producers themselves see the need. Government also sees need, young people. All want to develop the sector.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmworker wages are too low— need “social services” /safety net package to help with transportation, education, health, housing, child care, etc. Shared resources needed to make this possible. Social networks brought to agriculture community.</li> <li>• Philosophical debate about appropriate ag model fractures the ag community. Need to support overall growth of ag and support services for ag.</li> </ul>
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Global forces affecting agriculture and the workforce (0 votes)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global trends will drive demand for sustainable local agriculture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
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Leveraging local expertise/success (0 votes)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth and Diversity of marketing models (web, farmers markets, ESA, farm to table, value added, and traditional)</li> <li>• Diversified Agriculture is growing over the last 20 years, replacing imports, especially mid-sized diversified agriculture. Knowledge base in Hawaii to tap</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
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## **Report Back on Priorities to Larger Group**

1. Support and Involve Youth in Agriculture
  - Leverage their involvement/attitude
  - Increase involvement and education
  - Involve in solutions for the sector
2. Economic Constraints
  - Fuel, labor, feed, land, transportation
  - capital
3. Resources for Farming Support
  - UH Extension, HARC, Education programs
  - Rotating labor pool/labor
  - Federal/state funding—connecting to producers
  - Collaboration
  - Facilities