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Hawai'i Farmers Union United  
An Open Letter to the State of Hawai'i

6/25/2019

Senate President Ron Kouchi said this when he opened the 2019 legislative session:

*I am most passionate about a program the former lieutenant governor started, which is Farm to School... we sourced products from local farmers and ranchers...it's my desire to see our children who are going to school have the proper meal so that they can maximize and perform at their best...it should be something that they enjoy eating, something that will nurture their minds and bodies to have them perform at their optimum levels.*

As Hawai'i State institutions strive to increase procurement of local food, it is imperative that procedures, programs, and infrastructure be developed to enable all of Hawai'i's farmers to participate in this tremendous opportunity.

The members of Hawai'i Farmers Union United (HFUU) operate several community-based cooperatives and food hubs - defined by the USDA as "a centrally located facility with a business management structure facilitating the aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and/or marketing of locally/regionally produced food products." HFUU represents approximately 1,000 family farmers in Hawai'i, which comprise about a third of producers who supply our local food for local consumption.

HFUU and its members are aligned with the state's vision for increased food security and agricultural self-sufficiency. We therefore support institutional purchasing from local food hubs and agricultural cooperatives - who represent a large portion of Hawai'i's producers currently supplying state markets. Linking local farms to institutions not only builds our collective capacity for food production, but connects our communities with the 'āina (land), improves public health, develops an educated agricultural workforce, and enriches the local food system and environment. Successful farm-to-state programs have potential to drive increased food production, fueling the evolution of our local farming sector to one of thriving small businesses generating commercial, food safe volumes while building our communities' capacity to create jobs and strengthen their resilience.



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HFUU urges the State to take actions to reach these goals, as follows:

1. Establishment of a multi-stakeholder task force under the Lieutenant Governor's office to advance institutional food procurement with key partners including HI DOE's 'Āina Pono, Hawai'i Department of Agriculture, Hawai'i Department of Health, other state procurement offices, distributors, and groups that advocate for family farmers; this task force would develop a framework to address:
  - a. Increased regional sourcing of local food through food hubs, cooperatives and family farmers.
  - b. Mechanisms to promote binding contracts with producers and ensure timely payments for local food acquired by the State.
  - c. Purchases directly from family farmers and food hubs as these dollars multiply in the community and lead to more economic, social, and environmental benefits.
  - d. A clear and flexible bureaucratic structure and interface for exclusively-local food operators.
2. Funding means to support critical infrastructure to grow food hubs on every island, including:
  - a. Construction of food safety qualified facilities to include aggregation, washing, minimal processing, packaging, cold storage, and other value-added facilities.
  - b. Provision of technical assistance to help develop internal capacity to supply state institutions and other markets.

HFUU encourages the State of Hawai'i to enact long-term solutions to ensure good food for Hawai'i's public institutions and fair representation for food hubs and cooperatives.

HAWAII FARMERS UNION UNITED

Vincent Mina, President

Dash Kuhr  
HFUU Legislative Chair

Saleh Azizi  
HFUU Policy Chair

*The Hawaii Farmers Union United and its Chapters is a nonprofit corporation formed under Hawaii law. It advocates for the sovereign right of farmers to create and sustain vibrant and prosperous agricultural communities for the benefit of all Hawaii through cooperation, education and legislation.*