

Fresh sprouts at school

Sunset Beach students grow, harvest, sell and eat local produce, thanks to the help of farms and the community

By Joleen Oshiro

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Volunteer parent Erin Delventhal serves [BUY THIS PHOTO](#) last week's healthy snack, pineapple, to Koda Beschen, Bao Jones, Sam Stone and Kate Shower. Isaiahn, far right, takes a bite out of a pineapple slice.

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same goal: to plant seeds and nurture growth. At Sunset Beach Elementary School the figurative ideal has gone literal. Seed-planting, plus a healthy dose of support from educators, parents, farms and the community, has sprouted and nurtured students' love of gardening and their taste for locally grown fruits and vegetables.

On the Net:

- » kokuahawaiifoundation.org/schoolprograms/
- » studentfarmersmarket.com

On the school campus, students tend a garden and an orchard, thanks to donations from the community and support from the Kokua Hawaii Foundation. The 'AINA Kine Student Farmers' Market Club funds a biweekly healthy snack supplied mostly by local farms, and a weekly lunchtime salad bar comes via support of the foundation.

All this focus on local, healthful food began converging at the school in February 2009, when parent Erin Delventhal noticed that fruit from neighborhood trees was "left on the ground half the time."

"I knew they could be put to good use, so I set up a meeting with the principal and Kim Johnson of the Kokua Foundation, who also has kids at the school," she recalls.

The school organized a farmers market club for students and asked the community to donate home-

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When you think about it, farms and schools have the

grown produce for the first sale. On market day they had a table full of food that generated \$180 in one hour.

"When we asked the club what they wanted to do with the money, they said they wanted to provide the students with a healthy snack," Delventhal says. "The first snack was watermelon."

Since then, 15,000 healthy snacks have been served to the student body.

"Working with local farmers, I am usually able to purchase produce that is allowed to ripen naturally," says Delventhal. "Buying local gives the students the best-tasting snacks and, ultimately, influences their food choices. For instance, after serving starfruit from Poamoho Organic Produce in Waialua, we saw students lining up, quarters in hand, ready to purchase starfruit at the student farmers market."

Several months after that first market, the club received a grant from the foundation to plant a garden at the school. It also hosted a community tree drive that led to an orchard of guava, starfruit, kumquat, orange, lemon, lime, tangerine, grapefruit, sapodilla, wax jambu and sweetsop trees. Under the trees, the children planted sweet potato, pumpkin, zinnias, gardenias, lilikoi and pineapple.

Meanwhile, the school organized a fresh lunchtime salad bar.

Today, produce from the school garden takes its place on the farmers market table alongside donations, and Thursday lunches include a trip to the salad bar. And the students love it.

"One reason I enjoy the snacks is because they're healthy, but also because they're yummy," says Bliss O'Shea, a kindergartner. "Pineapple is my favorite. It's good and sweet."

Bliss' mother, Denise, says her daughter has learned a lot from the garden program.

"The garden is literally outside her classroom," she says. "They do a lot of educating the children about where food comes from. And now her dad is planting a garden with her because she's so interested."

Megan McHale, a sixth-grader, joined the Student Farmers' Market Club two years ago. She says that while she's always liked fruits and vegetables, the programs have her trying new foods.

"I'm eating healthier," she says. "I didn't like pineapple before but now I do. I'm enjoying a larger variety of fruits and vegetables."

Cultivating a consciousness for food education started years before the student farmers market. Seeds were planted in 2006, when Kokua Foundation introduced its environmental programs to Sunset Beach with a recycling program. Next came 'AINA in the Schools.

"This program is about connecting kids to where their food comes from, and showing them how to grow their own food," says program director Kaliko Amona.

'AINA in the Schools comprises several components: garden-based learning, lessons on nutrition, institution of healthful food on campuses, family and community outreach and farm field trips. The program works with 12 schools on Oahu, providing materials, funding, staff support and training for volunteers.

At Sunset Beach the key to making the most of those resources sprang from Delventhal. Other participants helped the programs fly: enthusiastic faculty such as Joe Cicak, a sixth-grade teacher who serves as adviser to the farmers market club; former principal Ruth Holmberg, who helped parents navigate federal food guidelines for preparing snacks and instituting the salad bar; cafeteria staff, who welcomed the salad bar; farms that provide produce for snacks; and a community willing to donate fruits, vegetables and plants.

"At Sunset Beach they're using the model of 'it takes a village to raise a child.' The students have a heart connection to growing food and eating food," says Dexter Kishida, Kokua's school food coordinator.

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"This is not about raising farmers. It's about raising eaters who understand what it takes to get that (food) to the table."

From an educational standpoint, Holmberg says the lessons extend beyond just food and gardens.

"Students must make the signage for the market, figure out how to display the produce, have the salesmanship to sell, be able to make change - there are lots of things going on," she says.

As if that's not enough, Delventhal see even more potential. Next up is agricultural fundraising.

"Last fall we found a pumpkin grower off Kunia Road and had a pre-sale. He gave us the pumpkins for \$7 apiece, and we sold them for \$12. We made \$255 - that's two months' worth of snacks!" she says.

Delventhal aspires to selling locally grown Christmas trees and poinsettia, flowers for Valentine's Day, and lei for May Day and graduation.

"People keep encouraging me to write grants, but in my mindset I'd like to keep this as self-sustaining as possible so that any other school can use this as a model," she says. "All schools have lots of potential; there's lots of land, water and the kids are free labor - and they get so much out of it."

Holmberg says it's important for school communities to keep an open, creative mind when attempting to start similar programs.

"My association with Kokua Foundation made me see the possibilities," she says. "You have to know people have done this and it's possible. There are barriers but it can be done."

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