

October is Farm-to-School Month in Hawaii

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By **Diana Duff**

Gov. Neil Abercrombie signed a proclamation Sept. 19 declaring October 2013 Farm-to-School and School Garden Month in Hawaii. This month, for the first time, Hawaii is joining with other states to celebrate the connections between schools, locally grown food and school gardens.

According to the proclamation, the purpose is to “encourage the citizens of the Aloha State to support the health and wellness of Hawaii’s school children by participating in activities that heighten the awareness of school gardens and community farms as a successful means of improving the health and wellness of our keiki.”



*Bougainvillea looper moth from cdfa.ca.gov –
“The parent of the Bougainvillea looper caterpillar is a small black and tan nocturnal moth that has a wingspan of about an inch.”*

The month long focus on school gardens serves to remind us of their importance in helping our children understand the origins of their food. Integrating school gardens into the curriculum increases students’ nutritional awareness and could help decrease or prevent childhood obesity, thus reducing future health care costs for the state.

The proclamation encourages connections between school food programs and farmers, ranchers, dairymen and fishermen. The objective of these connections is to provide healthy meals in school cafeterias while providing students with an education in agriculture, health and nutrition. Today, students on Hawaii Island are receiving more than 50 percent of their daily calories at school, which makes the quality of the food they eat very important. Locally sourced school food is fresher and has more nutritional quality than food shipped from off shore that is often weeks old.

Farm-to-school programs are now active in all 50 states. The programs have the combined goals of encouraging healthy eating in the schools, offering an opportunity for lessons in nutrition and encouraging outdoor physical activity in the school gardens. The programs also offer a chance for students to connect with their local agricultural community.

The Hawaii Island School Garden Network, a program of the Kohala Center, reaches out to more than 60 schools on Hawaii Island. Many of these schools have a half-time school garden coordinator working with teachers to connect the project-based, hands-on learning in the school gardens with academic subjects. According to a 2012 report, the state of Hawaii currently has 168 school gardens, involving 21,577 students and 830 teachers with about 30 acres of land.

The new cafeteria manager at Volcano School of Arts and Sciences recently started a farm-to-school lunch program and plans to eventually serve 100 students. Kona Pacific Public Charter School in Kealahou has also launched a farm-to-school lunch program, preparing fresh meals daily. Laupahoehoe Charter School in Hamakua, a USDA Farm to School Planning Grant Recipient for 2013, is planning a school farm that will eventually incorporate fresh foods into the school lunch menu.

An offshoot of the farm-to-school program, the USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program aims to create healthier school environments by providing fresh local fruit and vegetables for school snacks and lunch programs. More than 50 Hawaii schools participated last year.

As farm-to-school and school garden programs expand, many area schools hold events to share the bounty of knowledge as well as food with the community. One such event is the annual Fall Seed Exchange to be held from 3 to 6 p.m. Nov. 1 at Amy B.H. Greenwell Ethnobotanical Garden in Captain Cook.

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Tropical gardening helpline

Sharon asks: My bougainvillea hedge looks horrible. The leaves are all chewed and the plant does not look healthy. What do you think could be the problem?

Answer: You likely have the bougainvillea looper, *Disclisioprocta stellata*, eating the leaves of your hedge. This pest arrived in Hawaii as recently as 10 years ago, and has caused a lot of damage. The bougainvillea looper is a green or brown caterpillar, larval form of the looper moth, about an inch long. The adult moth usually lays its eggs on the underside of the leaves. When larvae emerge, they begin feeding at night. They have a voracious appetite. Like other caterpillars, the looper tends to feed from the outer edges of leaves in toward the center. This can result in severe scalloping of foliage but will not usually kill the plant.

Though the looper is not a serious pest of bougainvillea, your plant will look much better if you can get rid of them. One eradication technique is to hand pick them at night with a good flashlight and a jar with alcohol in the bottom to put them in.

The best low-tox treatment against the looper is Bt, *Bacillus thuringensis*. You can safely add other products to this mix such as neem oil and safer soap to add to the effectiveness of your attack. If left to nature, beneficial insects should eventually kill the loopers. But by itself will not harm beneficials. Chemical insecticides, such as Sevin, could be used, but most of them will kill beneficial insects as well.

<http://westhawaii.com/sections/news/local-features/october-farm-school-month-hawaii.html>