

## **Na Keiki O Ka 'Aina: Children of the Land**

*Sowing the seeds of social change through school gardens*

We humans share vast amounts of our genetic code with all other forms of life on Earth, and are made of the same basic elements as soil (if you haven't seen the movie "Dirt" yet, do). To have severed ourselves from nature and her natural cycles is to have caused the social and global crises we see today. A swift and thorough reconnection with what matters most is needed: now.

The solution is waiting in the soil on which we stand. Through the humble and attainable act of growing gardens we reestablish and gain new respect for our interconnectedness with everything. To touch the soil is to touch the source, and to eat is an act of faith in the world we wish to see.

I and others envision a world where industrial agriculture is replaced with agroecology, and "industrialized" education is replaced with an "organic" opportunity for every child to know nature and be given the space to grow. School gardens offer endless ways in which to nurture the creative mind, body and soul, and to cultivate school environments where learning is fun and focused on skills, service, sustainability, and mindful respect for each other and all living things.

Healthier habits, improved academic achievement, and stronger community connections are all real results of successful school garden programs. Teachers and administrators are inspired to see that school gardens support learning in every possible school subject while fostering a stronger sense of stewardship and personal responsibility. Intention-setting practices such as the offering of oli before entering an outdoor learning space help to additionally cultivate respect and a stronger sense of place and self. Furthermore, school peace gardens are specifically designed to serve as models for solutions to global conflicts, while providing physical spaces for compassionate communication to occur. Such school-wide initiatives strive to unveil the clear connection between peace and sustainability within the school community and beyond.

Major social transformation toward a brighter future will require the collaboration and collective impact of everyone with an interest in children's health and Hawaii's agriculture. The "Farm to School" concept in Hawaii has gained great support, with the recognition that we can simultaneously achieve secure markets for local farmers and fresh healthy whole foods for schools. Every sincere effort in support of Hawaii's small farmers, the protection of our agricultural lands, and the pono production of local foods for local consumption is necessary to meet this huge new demand, as are the collective efforts to seek solutions to the complicated process of school food procurement.

The educational aspects of Farm to School, including hands on gardening and nutrition education, farm field trips, and waste reduction and recycling through composting, are equally important for success, ensuring that students gain a taste for fresh healthy foods as well as a direct understanding of where their food comes from and why it matters. The infusion of agricultural and environmental education within the teacher training programs of our universities

and community colleges will serve to significantly expedite our society's transformation toward resilience.

Leaders of Hawaii's statewide school garden and farm to school movements have convened to take up the task of restoring agricultural education, from preschool through post-secondary stages, in a growing collaboration with schools and state agencies. We encourage your involvement in many ways, most especially through your support for a school near you. Visit [www.hawaiischoolgardenhui.org](http://www.hawaiischoolgardenhui.org) to connect with your island school garden network and get growing, today.

*Lydi Morgan Bernal is the School Garden Coordinator for 'AINA In Schools, a Farm to School program of the Kokua Hawai'i Foundation. She is also a current member of the Agricultural Leadership Foundation of Hawai'i's Agricultural Leadership Program, and a recent graduate of UH CTAHR's Master Gardener course.*

*June 13, 2011*