

School Garden fosters Community and Sustainability

By Roger Harris & Diane Koerner

Mala'ai: The Culinary Garden of Waimea Middle School shares the bounty of their school garden with students, families, faculty and the community too. Long a teaching force that combines the pleasure and excitement of working with the earth and growing food, the Mala'ai Saturday afternoon Crop Share gathers the abundance of their garden as well as surplus produce from nearby farms and offers them to the community.

The brainchild of Mala'ai intern and UH Manoa PhD candidate, Nicole Milne, Crop Share was designed to help the community share their bounty, letting nothing go to waste.

Participating at the Crop Share is simple — bring surplus produce from your farm or garden or, if you don't have veggies, fruit or herbs to share, come anyway — you can lend a hand. Milne and the students were delighted that after giving a woman (who had no produce to share) some mint she needed to make spring rolls, the woman surprised the students with delicious samples of the rolls the next school day. Leftover Crop Share produce is donated to local food banks to reach those who need it.

According to the Kohala Center, a sponsor of the program, Crop Share accepted over 1,000 pounds of produce last Fall, with participants swapping about half of that and donating the other half through the Annunciation Church in Waimea.

In addition to inspiring its students, Mala'ai has an ongoing program of free workshops for the community, most recently on Natural Bee Keeping Practices, Raising Chickens in Your Backyard, and Vermicomposting.

Upcoming workshops include a Talk Story on April 30 with Chadd Paishon, a Hawaiian Voyager and Paniolo, on "He Wa'a he Moku, he Moku he Wa'a: The canoe is an island, the island is a canoe," ancestral wisdom on sustainability. On May 14, there will be a workshop on Brining Vegetables, a simple, easy method of preserving food, with Mala'ai volunteer Mimi Shawe.

Sixth, seventh and eighth grade students work the Mala'ai three-quarter-acre organic garden — an outdoor, living classroom where school curriculum is integrated with environmental and cultural stewardship, healthy nutrition and lifestyle choices. The garden is a private 501c3 non-profit, funded by community donations, grants and fundraisers.

During the month of April, Village Burger in Waimea is contributing all proceeds from the sale of "Simply Herbs" Iced Tea to Mala'ai. It is a refreshing herbal infusion made from Moroccan mint, Hawaiian Mamaki, lemongrass and Mexican tarragon cultivated just 450 footsteps away by the students at Mala'ai.

Join in the sustainability efforts of Mala'ai by purchasing their fundraiser tea, attend or offer to share your expertise at a Mala'ai workshop, and take advantage of the weekly Crop Shares, which will continue every Saturday through the end of May, from 12:30 p.m. to 3 p.m. If you need assistance harvesting your fruits and vegetables or delivering your produce to the Crop Share, Mala'ai can help.

Contact Nicole Milne at 987-9210 or e-mail nmilne@hawaii.edu for more information on Crop Shares or to register for upcoming workshops.