

Eat-Think-Grow events for families and teachers

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August 22, 2012

Wednesday, August 15th, 2012

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Learn simple ways to encourage healthy eating habits and curb growing obesity rates
By Big Island Weekly

In hopes of reversing the trend of skyrocketing childhood and adult obesity rates, several Hawai'i Island organizations are working together to provide free educational workshops and events for families and school garden teachers.

Eat-Think-Grow—an initiative created by The Kohala Center in conjunction with its Hawai'i Island School Garden Network (HISGN) program—will host nutrition education events for island families and community members during the 2012-2013 school year. Additionally, Eat-Think-Grow provides professional development workshops for school garden and class teachers to increase their nutrition knowledge. Eat-Think-Grow is made possible with financial support from the Hawai'i Island Beacon Community's Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) Program.

"We are living in an era where today's children are likely to have shorter life spans than their parents," said Vivienne Aronowitz, a registered dietitian, certified diabetes educator and the nutritionist for all Kaiser Permanente Clinics on Hawai'i Island. "One out of three children is or will be at risk for diabetes, and obesity will only increase their risks for heart disease, hypertension, and stroke as well. Parents can and should play the greatest role in establishing healthier eating habits in the home. Incorporating healthier foods and physical activity into daily lives is certainly a lot easier when everyone in the family works together. And teachers can have a profound influence on their students' knowledge and behaviors. Eat-Think-Grow is designed to help island families, residents, and teachers succeed by promoting and supporting healthier eating habits and activities."

Through January 2013, Eat-Think-Grow will host a variety of free workshops designed to give participants a greater understanding of nutrition, gardening, healthy and affordable local ingredient options, as well as recipes and hands-on cooking demonstrations.

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Family Nutrition Nights

"Getting Back to Your Roots: Raising Healthy Keiki in Today's World" are evening events for parents and students facilitated by Aronowitz. Attendees will participate in a school garden tour, followed by a presentation by Aronowitz and a demonstration on how to make healthy snacks kids will enjoy. Families will also agree on an action plan they will embark on together. These events will be presented on Tuesday, August 28 at Kahakai Elementary School from 5–7 p.m. and Wednesday, August 29 at Hilo Union Elementary School, from 5–7 p.m.

Families may reserve space for either evening by emailing Donna Mitts at dmitts@kohalacenter.org or by calling The Kohala Center at 887-6411.

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Teacher Workshops

Hawai'i Island educators who teach or participate in school garden programs are invited to attend a two-part workshop series, "The Foundations of Garden-Based Nutrition: a Workshop for Teachers." Facilitated by Aronowitz and other island nutritionists, the series will extend participants' basic nutrition knowledge, while emphasizing the relationship between children's nutritional needs and garden-based learning. These sessions will also give participants materials to use with students, ideas for incorporating healthy eating into their school garden programs, and hands-on opportunities to prepare meals and snacks with whole foods and locally grown garden fruits and vegetables. The workshops will be presented on:

Session 1: September 15, Kahakai Elementary School, Kailua-Kona, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Session 1: November 10, Hawai'i Academy of Arts and Science, Pahoa, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Session 2: January 12, 2013; Kua O Ka La Public Charter School, Pahoa, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Session 2: January 26, 2013; Innovations Public Charter School, Kailua-Kona, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Eligible teachers may reserve space in the workshops by emailing Donna Mitts at dmitts@kohalacenter.org or by calling The Kohala Center at 887-6411.

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School Food Festivals

Three schools on Hawai'i Island will host School Food Festivals during the traditional makahiki season, the time of year between harvesting and preparing the following year's crops. The food festivals will share work being done by teachers and school garden educators to increase students' nutritional awareness and healthy food choices, increase physical activity, and help to create lifelong habits that support well being. Each school listed below has a special interest in their community's health, and these events will celebrate food that is nutritious, tasty, and fun to grow, prepare, and eat. Food festivals will be held on:

November 17: Kahakai Elementary School, Kailua-Kona

November 17: Mala'ai at Waimea Middle School, Waimea

December 14: Kua O Ka La Public Charter School, Pahoa

"Hawai'i Island is such an ideal place to live for anyone who wants to eat and live healthier," said Aronowitz. "We are able to grow and harvest a wide variety of nutritious foods here, we have some of the finest farmers markets in the country, and our climate is ideal for outdoor activities year-round. Eat-Think-Grow helps island residents appreciate and take advantage of these gifts, while providing education, inspiration, and support. Together, we can slow and reverse obesity rates so our keiki can look forward to a healthier, happier future."