

Big Island Green | Big Island Weekly

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By Roger Harris

As consumers, we face a myriad of decisions every day about our food choices. We are tempted and teased by dozens of labels stating “organically grown,” “no-spray,” “raised without antibiotics,” “naturally farmed” and “free range.” Well, imagine the dizziness organic producers must feel about how to deliver a quality and correctly labeled product to the marketplace at a sustainable price, whether that is a roadside stand, CSA, grocery, restaurant or wholesale distributor.

Lucky we live Big Island because the Laulima Center, a program of the Kohala Center in Waimea, sprang to meet the gap between what is, and what needs to be. One of the outcomes of their continued efforts is a conference, “Growing Organics: Moving Hawaii’s Organic Industry Forward,” to be held Monday, October 28 from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at King Kamehameha’s Kona Beach Hotel.

“This initiative was born because Hawaii’s organic food producers did not have a central place where they could obtain information on critical issues such as infrastructure, processing, marketing, certification and business development,” said Melanie Bondera, rural cooperative development specialist for the Laulima Center.

The Growing Organics event will function as a forum for a statewide Organic Industry Advisory Group (OIAG) organized by The Kohala Center in February 2013, to present recommendations to the Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDOA). According to Liam Kernell, Communication and Project Management Specialist at the Kohala Center, a public survey officially ended in early August, but input can still be made via email to info@kohalacenter.org.

Scott Enright, deputy director of the HDOA and a longtime Big Island agronomist, will deliver a keynote address. Admission to his speech is free and open to the public.

From 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., the advisory group will present its survey results and the public is encouraged to attend and provide feedback both on the findings and the OIAG’s draft recommendations to the HDOA. That session is free also, but attendees are asked to pre-register by calling (808) 887-6411, or by going online to <http://growingorganics.eventbrite.com>. Incidentally, the center will release its final report and recommendations to the HDOA early next year.

Derek Kurisu, executive vice president of KTA Superstores, will be the featured speaker at the event’s luncheon. His talk, “Developing an Organic Hawaii Brand,” is based on the huge success of KTA’s popular Mountain Apple brand of locally grown products. Tickets for the luncheon are \$30 and the hotel has pledged to source as many local organic ingredients for the menu as possible.

The afternoon will be devoted to a fascinating variety of for-fee (\$20 total) workshops including the development of a legislative agenda for Hawaii’s organic industry, a meet-n-greet session for producers, distributors and retailers and a presentation on the best practices for organic certification. An in-depth look at defining the roles and responsibilities of an independent industry association will also be shared.

So, whether you are one of Hawaii’s organic food producers, distributors, retailers, or just a consumer or advocate, mark this day on your calendar as one sure to inform and empower you.