

# **Agriculture Needs to be Protected and Supported**

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**Farmers must be treated as professionals.** Historically, farming has been linked with career and technical/vocational education, rather than the high level of education and expertise associated with those we consider “professionals.” In practice, however, successful farmers develop deep, highly integrated knowledge spanning far more content areas than those in other professions. Highly paid professionals are often valued for their skill sets, whereas farmers are valued based on their commodity – they are valued by the head of lettuce or bouquet of flowers they produce, rather than the skill involved in raising those crops. Beyond that, farming is not simply the act of producing a crop; farming is creating and executing a business plan, as well as stewardship, natural resources management, sustainability, and planning for the future of the world. The non-economic values and contributions of farming must be recognized, and the economic value placed on farmers must be increased accordingly. Furthermore, it must also be recognized that agriculture and natural resources management are the backbone of food production, energy production, scientific research, and many other sectors that support our world’s populations.

To sustain a vibrant culture and healthy population of farmers and those they serve,

- Farmers must be treated as professionals, alongside physicians, teachers, and bankers.
- Farming must allow for the earning of a living wage and the prospect of profits.
- Public policy must support the education and development of the next generation of farmers and consumers.
- Public policy must also promote the “freedom to farm” and allowing farmers to make production choices that are within Federal regulations.
- Public agricultural policy must promote investment in agricultural infrastructure that supports all facets of agricultural industry and economy. These infrastructure components include, but are not limited to:
  - Water resources
  - Renewable and affordable energy
  - Transportation

**Agriculture is a diverse and controversial industry, with roots as old as society itself.**

Hawai'i has supported a culture of technological innovation in agriculture and natural resource management since the first Polynesian communities were established well over a thousand years ago. Since those first settlers, Hawai'i has been a site of unparalleled agricultural diversity and management – from historic agroforestry, aquaculture, and natural resources management, to our current state of diversified agriculture, native ecosystem conservation, ecotourism, and biotechnology. In addition, our culture then and

now is unique – our values are based on principles of kindness and *aloha* enacted in every aspect of our lives. This culture of *aloha* is threatened, however, by prolonged periods of strain associated with a long history of miscommunication and mistrust of agriculture; environmental mismanagement relating to the use of water, land, and ocean resources may only be attributable to some but are points of contention for all. Special interest groups and extremists perpetuate this strain by spreading misinformation, adding layers of fear and aggression to agricultural debates. These factors are destroying our pathways and ability to have productive conversations and work towards conflict resolution.

To help create safe spaces for productive discussions involving informed participants,

- Education around agriculture must include consumer education. We are raising the next generation of consumers, only few of which will be farmers.
- Education about major topics in agriculture should be inclusive, focusing on “choice” and “informed decision making.”
- Collaborations between various sectors of the industry and society must be supported and facilitated, with our culture and heritage in mind as we plan for the future.

**To address these focus areas, we ask for your guidance, leadership, and advocacy in taking next steps, such as:**

- Convene leaders in agriculture, agricultural education, and agricultural advocacy to determine how best to break through hurdles that hold back or hinder agriculture in Hawai'i;
- Invest more in agricultural technology that works in harmony with our environment and culture as well as provides much needed food security for our ever-growing global population;
- Support collaborative efforts across multiple industries (utilizing support groups such as Hawai'i Farmers & Ranchers United and Hawai'i Farmers & Ranchers Alliance) within agriculture in order to create a more unified front;
- Provide stronger support for agricultural education in schools through provision of more incentives for teachers to go into this field, more agriculture related programs of study for students, and development of more partnerships between agriculture-based operations and businesses or enterprises and schools (funding for field trips and research projects);
- Support and advocate for the development of critical thinking skills in our future generation, so they are taught to seek truth and act as informed decision-makers;
- Support and develop policies that promote the “freedom to farm,” secure critical infrastructure components to assist all facets of agriculture, and ensure financial sustainability of farming for the future generations.

The Agricultural Leadership Program is a statewide program of the Agricultural Leadership Foundation of Hawai'i, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, that brings together promising leaders from Hawaii's agriculture, natural resources management, and rural community sectors. By combining strong leadership content with exposure to organizations, agricultural operations and community networks, participants develop their path toward becoming the innovative problem-solvers and leaders that are needed in Hawai'i. [www.agleaderhi.org](http://www.agleaderhi.org); [office@agleaderhi.org](mailto:office@agleaderhi.org).