

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



DEPT. COMM. NO. 241

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Chairperson, Board of Agriculture
DEXTER KISHIDA
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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December 23, 2024

The Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi,
President and Members of the Senate
Thirty-Third State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 409
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

The Honorable Nadine K. Nakamura,
Speaker, and Members of the House
of Representatives
Thirty-Third State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 431
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear President Kouchi, Speaker Nakamura, and Members of the Legislature:

For your information and consideration, I am transmitting a copy of the Annual Report on the Farmer Apprentice Mentoring Program as required by Act 304, SLH 2022. In accordance with Section 93-16, Hawaii Revised Statutes, I am also informing you that the report may be viewed electronically at <https://hdoa.hawaii.gov/meetings-reports/legislative-reports/>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sharon Hurd".

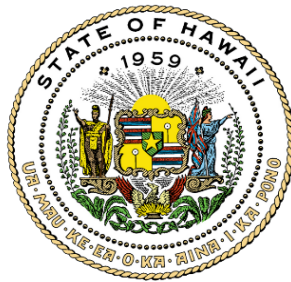
Sharon Hurd
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

Attachments



**REPORT TO THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
2025 REGULAR SESSION**

FARMER APPRENTICE MENTORING PROGRAM



Prepared by:

The Hawai'i Department of Agriculture

Pursuant to Act 304, Session Laws of Hawaii 2022

Requiring the Board of Agriculture to Report

Annually on the Programs's Operation and Related Performance Measures

December 2024

FARMER APPRENTICE MENTORING PROGRAM

Annual Report to Legislature for Fiscal Year 2025

Background

In the Thirty-first State Legislature, Regular Session of 2022, Act 304 was passed, amending Chapter 141 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) to include a new section to part I. This amendment mandates the Department of Agriculture to establish the Farmer Apprentice Mentoring Program (FAMP) and to provide an annual report to the legislature detailing the program's operation and associated performance measures. Subsequently, the Governor released \$270,000 in March 2023, subject to a 10% restriction. In May 2023, an agency-to-agency procurement contract was issued to Leeward Community College (LCC), with a contract term ending on November 30, 2024. The report outlines the following requirements:

1. Farmer Apprentice Enrollment.
2. Listing of Known Qualified Mentorship Provider.
3. Assessment on Ability of Mentorship Providers.
4. Evaluation of Program Results Achieved.

Executive Summary

Since the issuance of the contract, LCC has successfully submitted three progress reports. This current report covers the period from January 2, 2024, to December 13, 2024. Despite its diligent efforts, LCC faced significant challenges in recruiting an academic support specialist and project coordinator for the project. Due to delays in staff hiring, the project requirements could not be met according to the original schedule. Consequently, LCC requested a no-cost extension for an additional year, with a new expiration date of November 30, 2024. After review, the HDOA deemed the extension request reasonable and approved it. This report outlines activities completed to date.

January to May 2024 Reporting Period

Within the reporting period covered herein, the following activities were undertaken:

- Recruited Academic Support Specialist.
- Researched Farmer Training and Farmer Apprentice Programs.
- Attended Gatherings of Farmer Advocates and Agriculture Industry Stakeholders.
- Researched Registered Apprenticeship Programs.
- Collecting Research Reports (2014-2024).

Recruited Academic Support Specialist

A position description for an Academic Support Specialist was drafted to focus on stakeholder outreach, meeting coordination, and data collection. Initial recruitment

(September 2023–February 2024) attracted five applicants, but none were deemed adequately prepared, leading to termination of the process. The position was revised with stricter qualifications, and a faster casual hire process was initiated. By May 2024, one highly qualified candidate with extensive farming knowledge and strong local connections was hired. The candidate was set to begin in June 2024.

Researched Farmer Training and Farmer Apprentices Programs

The Project Coordinator continued her analysis of best practices in farmer apprentice programs, and developed three tools: an inventory of Hawai‘i’s farmer training programs (credit and non-credit, N=58), an inventory of farmer and farm manager apprenticeship programs (N=15), and a literature review of farmer training research. Initial findings revealed Hawai‘i’s programs focus on foundational skills, are short-term, and region-specific, often grant-dependent, with high costs. Gaps include advanced training in agronomy, business skills, precision agriculture, and climate resilience. Inspired by Wisconsin’s farm manager model, the team will gather stakeholder feedback and refine recommendations for an apprenticeship curriculum in the final report.

Attended Gatherings of Farmer Advocates and Agriculture Industry Stakeholders

The Project Coordinator further enhance her understanding of Hawai‘i’s agricultural challenges and opportunities by engaging with stakeholders, attending events, workshops, and site visits. Key topics included access to land, water, affordable housing, and skilled labor; integrating Indigenous values; and policy improvements. Visits to Kahumana Food Hub highlighted fair trade practices, while agri-PV research showcased innovations and barriers. Stakeholder conversations revealed critical needs, such as labor pooling and strengthening training pathways. Partnerships with industry leaders explored solutions like farmer apprenticeships and workforce housing. Insights from these engagements will shape the coordinator’s curriculum design and future strategies for advancing Hawai‘i’s agricultural sector.

Researched Registered Apprenticeship Programs

Research revealed many “farmer apprentice” programs lacked key elements of registered apprenticeships. To align this project, the team studied U.S. Department of Labor and Hawai‘i’s registered apprenticeships, consulted with DLIR specialists, and identified no existing agricultural programs in Hawai‘i. Registered apprenticeships offer paid training validated by experts, combining on-the-job (OJT) and related instruction (RTI). Programs reviewed required 4,000 hours of OJT, industry-relevant curricula, wages, and credentials. States like Pennsylvania, California, and Wisconsin achieved this status, demonstrating industry commitment and federal funding eligibility.

Collecting Research Reports (2014-2024)

This project seeks to develop a farmer apprenticeship program that is collaboratively supported by Hawai‘i’s farmers, training providers, and agriculture stakeholders. Through a meta-synthesis of recent research, the project will analyze stakeholder goals, needs, and challenges to generate insights for a program that is both relevant and responsive. The objectives include designing a framework aligned with stakeholders’ priorities, developing

theories to support program piloting and policymaking, and addressing “collaboration fatigue” (Tasler, 2014), a phenomenon which arises when stakeholders are frequently asked for input on complex issues.

June to December 2024 Reporting Period

Within the reporting period covered herein, the following activities were undertaken:

- On-boarded Outreach and Research Specialist.
- Developed Outreach Plan.
- Conducted Progress Meeting with HDOA.
- Submitted a One-year, No-cost Extension to HDOA.
- Secured Approval from UH Mānoa’s Institutional Research Board (IRB).
- Launched First Phase of Project’s Farmer Outreach Activities.

On-boarded Outreach and Research Specialist

A new, full-time position designed to fulfill the project’s key activities: stakeholder outreach, meeting coordination, data collection and analysis was drafted, advertised, screened, and successfully filled in June 2024. The new hire began working with the project on July 1, 2024. The Project Coordinator oriented the new hire to LCC’s key personnel and offices that would be needed to execute the project’s activities and acquainted him with their forms and procedures.

Developed Outreach Plan

After completing the Outreach and Research Specialist’s on-boarding activities, the Project Coordinator shifted their efforts toward building an outreach plan and a research proposal for the Principal Investigator and HDOA review. To support the diverse needs and goals of Hawai‘i’s current and prospective farmers in designing a farmer apprentice program, the Outreach and Research Specialist developed a mixed-methods research proposal guided by the following overarching question:

“What kind of agricultural program would Hawai‘i need to develop such that the children and grandchildren of contemporary farmers would be motivated to remain on the ‘āina and continue producing food for our communities?”

Project personnel selected the following activities to gather quantitative and qualitative data, aiming to better understanding the diverse perspectives within Hawai‘i’s agricultural sector:

- 15-20 in-depth interviews with farmers and aspiring farmers.
- 5-10 interviews with agricultural policymakers, farmer training providers, and other experts.
- An on-line survey targeting 100+ respondents.
- On-going participant observation at agricultural events and farm visits.

Conducted Progress Meeting with HDOA

In August 2024, the Project Coordinator conducted a meeting with the HDOA to introduce the new Outreach and Research Specialist and to present an overview of their near-term activities. Summaries about the project's hiring delays, research on farmer apprentice program "best practices," farmer outreach plans and objectives, and the need for a one-year, no-cost extension were discussed. The HDOA representative was satisfied with the activities described and provided instructions on how to apply to the department for a no-cost extension.

Submitted a One-year, No-cost Extension to HDOA

As the project suffered a delay in recruiting a highly qualified candidate to conduct its outreach and research activities, the Principal Investigator requested a one-year, no-cost extension. The contract was set to end on November 30, 2024. Approval of this request was essential to fully execute the contract's activities and deliverables.

Secured Approval from UH Mānoa's Institutional Research Board (IRB)

To fulfill the IRB's requirements for ethical researchers, both project staff members earned certifications from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program's refresher course (July 2024). Further, because project personnel are eager to solicit input from an important and relevant stakeholder group: participants and educators at Kulani, Waiawa, and Women's Correctional Facilities' robust agricultural training programs, project personnel fulfilled the IRB's additional requirements for research involving incarcerated persons (September 2024). The impetus to invite the farmer training participants and educators from these correctional facilities arose out reviewing the facilities' impressive farmer training accomplishments that were reported in the Department of Public Safety's (DPS) Annual Report (Fiscal Year 2022).

Launched First Phase of Project's Farmer Outreach Activities

After receiving UH IRB's approval to conduct farmer and agricultural stakeholder interviews and surveys, the project's personnel launched the first phase of their outreach activities as described below:

State of Hawai'i Correctional Facilities (September 2024 and on-going)

Immediately after receiving and since IRB approval to collect data from agricultural stakeholders at Hawai'i's prisons (September 2024), LCC personnel have contacted the wardens at the respective facilities to request permission and instructions on how to meet and interview both agriculture training participants and providers. In September 2024, all three wardens (or their designees) have responded with interest to participate in the project and are willing to facilitate access to their farmer training participants. In November 2024, the project team had requested additional assistance from the Waiawa Warden's office who offered to assist in making contact.

Hawai'i Farmers Union United Convention (HFUU) (October 2024 at Maui College)

Project personnel attended the annual Hawaii Farmers Union United's convention as a means of launching their farmer activities. This decision served the project well as it was co-located at Maui College with the Hawaii Tropical Fruit Grower Association's annual convention. Before traveling to Maui for the HFUU convention, project personnel requested permission and secured invitations to conduct interviews and site visits at the following Maui farms:

- [Hawaii Taro Farm LLC](#)
- [Lā Kāhea Community Farm](#)

Finding from the interviews and site visits will be included in the next progress report, scheduled for submission to HDOA in May 2025.