

## For Immediate Release

### **FoodCorps program launches in Hawai‘i** *Initiative connects children to fresh, healthy food*

KAMUELA, Hawai‘i—September 23, 2013—FoodCorps, a national non-profit program in partnership with the AmeriCorps service network, addresses childhood obesity and food insecurity in underserved communities. This year, FoodCorps has selected The Kohala Center as the host site for the state of Hawai‘i’s FoodCorps Program. Operating in fifteen states, FoodCorps has added Hawai‘i, California, and New Jersey to its roster for the 2013-2014 service year.

Hawai‘i’s FoodCorps service sites for 2013-2014 are:

- MA‘O Organic Farms, O‘ahu
- Sust‘ainable Molokai, Moloka‘i School Garden Network
- The Kohala Center, Hawai‘i Island School Garden Network, host site

Eight FoodCorps service members have been chosen to serve for a year at public and charter schools beginning September 1. The schools, members, and their supervisors are:

- Wai‘anae Elementary School, O‘ahu: Service Member Tasia Yamamura, Site Supervisor Terri Langley
- Moloka‘i High School, Moloka‘i: Service member Lacey Phifer and Simon Mendes, Site Supervisor Emillia Noordhoek
- Maunaloa Elementary School, Moloka‘i: Service members Simon Mendes, Site Supervisor Emillia Noordhoek
- Kohala Elementary School, North Kohala, Hawai‘i Island: Service Member Janette Lee, Site Supervisor/Vice-Principal Bruce Kawachika
- Honaunau Elementary School, South Kona, Hawai‘i Island: Service Member Jessica Sobocinski, Site Supervisor/Garden Coordinator Melissa Chivers
- Na‘alehu Elementary School, Ka‘u, Hawai‘i Island: Service Member Jolyne Oyama, Site Supervisor/Vice-Principal Karen Pare, and Garden Coordinator Arroyo Pintora
- Kua O Ka La Public Charter School, Puna, Hawai‘i Island: Service Member Leina‘ala Kealoha, Site Supervisor Puanani Wilhelm
- [Mala‘ai](#): The Culinary Garden of Waimea Middle School: Service Member Julia Nemoto, Site Supervisor Amanda Rieux

Nancy Redfeather, program director of the Hawai‘i Island School Garden Network (HISGN) and host site supervisor of FoodCorps Hawai‘i, said about 1,000 applications from around the nation were submitted for the service member positions. After a FoodCorps committee screening, eighty-three applications were sent to Redfeather, who said there were many extremely well-qualified applicants. Ultimately, Hawai‘i school principals made the final selections.

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**Contact:** Janis Wong

Media Relations, The Kohala Center

[jwong@kohalacenter.org](mailto:jwong@kohalacenter.org)

direct: 808-325-1114, office: 808-887-6411

“Six of the eight service members chosen for Hawai‘i were from their own communities,” Redfeather said. “Hawai‘i is a unique place with a different environment and a different culture. It can take a year or so to understand Hawai‘i, so when applicants are from the local communities, they can be effective leaders immediately.” Redfeather listed desired qualities such as knowledge of local culture and values, dedication to healthy communities, a sense of *kuleana* (responsibility) to foster youth, and the willingness to develop innovative practices to build food systems.

Wai‘anae service member Yamamura said. “I love seeing students grow in confidence through garden explorations and reconnecting with the *‘aina* (land). I am constantly in awe of the nourishing power of food—for our bodies, communities, environment—and am so appreciative for this opportunity to share that with my new Wai‘anae community.”

FoodCorps fellow Amelia Pedini will coordinate the FoodCorps Hawai‘i program and be the liaison between The Kohala Center, FoodCorps Hawai‘i service members, and the national FoodCorps team. The service members will also be part of the Ku ‘Aina Pa program, a year-long school garden teacher training course funded in part by a USDA/SPECA “Ag in the Classroom K-12” grant to The Kohala Center’s HISGN program.

The eight Hawai‘i schools selected as service sites are committed to building garden-based nutritional education programs, and expanding the connections between hands-on learning and core curriculum. The three pillars of FoodCorps approach are knowledge, engagement and access:

- **Knowledge:** FoodCorps service members teach children about what healthy food is and where it comes from, while integrating these activities into academic subjects. Service members strive to increase both the quality and quantity of this education by identifying, adapting, and creating curriculum materials and working with teachers to integrate ongoing series of food and nutrition activity lessons into classes as diverse as health, math, English, and science.
- **Engagement:** School gardens are powerful gateways to encouraging children to try new foods. Service members grow healthy food with students, teachers, and community members in school gardens, which serve as dynamic educational settings where kids can get their hands dirty and experience what they are learning first-hand.
- **Access:** Service members increase children’s access to and information about healthy food in school cafeterias by working with schools to offer their students opportunities to eat nutritious meals made up of the foods they’ve studied and grown. In Hawai‘i, service members will work with their schools’ USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to source in-season, locally produced fruits and vegetables for morning snacks. FoodCorps Hawai‘i will work with the Hawai‘i Department of Education’s Office of Child Nutrition to begin building relationships between Hawai‘i farms and local schools.

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Contact: Janis Wong

Media Relations, The Kohala Center

[jwong@kohalacenter.org](mailto:jwong@kohalacenter.org),

direct: 808-325-1114, office: 808-887-6411

When these three pillars of FoodCorps’ approach are implemented together, there are changes in children’s attitudes toward the consumption of healthy food. Children adopt healthier lifestyles, improve their academic performance, and obtain real-life learning experiences about sustainability and eco-literacy.

In its first two years, FoodCorps gained national attention by providing an innovative, grassroots, and scalable approach to solving the United States’ childhood obesity epidemic. Since 1980, the percentage of American children who are overweight or obese has doubled. With one in four children struggling with hunger and one in three obese or overweight, FoodCorps addresses the root cause of both: access to healthy food. FoodCorps has expanded its reach and grown its ranks every year since its inception in 2011.

“There is so much opportunity here in Hawai‘i,” Pedini said. “We are still at the beginning of something very exciting, and our team is eager to foster that growth. While FoodCorps Hawai‘i is starting in a handful of schools, we would love to see a school garden in every school because all children deserve access to healthy, affordable food and all children should grow up knowing exactly where it comes from.”

“The movement to reconnect our children and youth to the sources of their food and health, and to renew their connections to the ‘aina, the source of all life, is well recognized at the community level,” Redfeather said. “To have the national FoodCorps select Hawai‘i for additional support is a result of the work of Hawai‘i’s garden and classroom teachers, principals, and communities throughout the islands.”

**About FoodCorps**

FoodCorps (<https://foodcorps.org/>) is a nationwide team of leaders that connects kids to real food and helps them grow up healthy. FoodCorps places motivated leaders in limited-resource communities for a year of public service where they teach kids about what healthy food is and where it comes from, build and tend school gardens, and bring high-quality local food into public school cafeterias. Funding for FoodCorps is provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, AmeriCorps, and a diverse array of private and public donors.

**About The Kohala Center**

The Kohala Center (<http://www.kohalacenter.org>) is an independent, community-based center for research, education, and conservation. The center was established in direct response to the request of island residents to create greater educational and employment opportunities by enhancing—and celebrating—Hawai‘i’s spectacular natural and cultural landscapes.

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[photo caption]

FoodCorps Hawai'i service members are (front row, left to right) Jane Lee, Kohala Elementary, Hawai'i Island; Tasia Yamamura, MA'O Organic Farms, O'ahu; Jessica Sobocinski, Honaunau Elementary, Hawai'i Island; Jolyne Oyama, Na'alehu Elementary, Hawai'i Island.

(back row, left to right) Simon Mendes, Sust'ainable Molokai, Moloka'i; Leina'ala Kealoha, Kua O Ka La Public Charter School, Hawai'i Island; Amelia Pedini, FoodCorps Fellow/Hawai'i Coordinator; Lacey Phifer, Sust'ainable Molokai, Moloka'i; Julia Nemoto, Mala'ai: The Culinary Garden of Waimea Middle School, Hawai'i Island.

**Media Contact:**

Janis Wong, media relations

The Kohala Center

[jwong@kohalacenter.org](mailto:jwong@kohalacenter.org)

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