

For Immediate Release

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Report ties expansion of a local food system to community health

KAMUELA, Hawai‘i—March 15, 2012—Expanding production and access to locally grown food in Hawai‘i County could decrease hunger, increase community food security, and strengthen the island’s economy according to a report released today by The Kohala Center.

Prepared in partnership with the Hawai‘i Department of Agriculture and Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research Hawai‘i, the report is a health impact assessment (HIA), which helps to identify and address the health effects of a proposed project or policy. Findings of this HIA of the 2010 Hawai‘i County Agriculture Development Plan underscore the importance of greater island food self-reliance in supporting community well-being.

The purpose of the Hawai‘i County Agriculture Development Plan was to guide county government, local businesses, and industry organizations in their efforts to revitalize agriculture as a basis for economic development.

Some key recommendations in the health impact assessment include:

- Modifying Hawai‘i State procurement practices to allow schools and other government institutions to purchase of locally produced foods more easily;
- Promoting agricultural career pathways at the high school and college levels;
- Making the purchase of fresh local food more convenient and affordable in rural areas;
- Increasing local food processing capacity through public-private partnerships.

“We found that increasing local food production and providing some of that food to our school lunch programs would have positive economic impact and a number of more direct health benefits—for example, shaping children’s preferences for healthy food and making more fresh fruits and vegetables accessible to all island residents,” said Betsy Cole, Ed.D., deputy director of The Kohala Center and a co-author of the report. “As most people know by now, increased consumption of produce is linked to lower rates of obesity and associated chronic diseases.”

The report also cites research linking the employment resulting from expanded agricultural production to better family health outcomes, while home production provides additional benefits of increased physical activity and improved mental health.

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are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Health Impact Project, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation or The Pew Charitable Trusts.

The Kohala Center is an independent, not-for-profit center for research and education *about* and *for* the environment. The Kohala Center builds teaching and research programs for energy and food self-reliance as well as ecosystem health. The complete Health Impact Assessment, including an Executive Summary of key findings and recommendations is available on The Kohala Center's Web site: <http://www.kohalacenter.org/research.html>.

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