

For Immediate Release

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County, foundation invest in West Hawai‘i school learning gardens

Kamuela, Hawai‘i—July 30, 2015—For the first time in its history, Holualoa Elementary School will have a part-time school garden educator thanks to a unique public-private partnership facilitated by a community-based nonprofit organization.

The Kohala Center, with support from the County of Hawai‘i’s Research & Development Department and the Hickey Family Foundation, will expand capacity in the Native Hawaiian learning garden of Holualoa Elementary School and support other school garden programs in the West Hawai‘i complex for the 2015–2016 school year.

Kamuela Meheula-Naihe, a Kailua-Kona native with extensive experience creating and curating learning gardens, will head the project. She began working in school gardens in 2008 as a parent-volunteer, helping to establish the learning garden at Ke Kula ‘o ‘Ehunuikaimalino in Kealakekua. In 2010, Meheula-Naihe established Hua o Ke Ao, an after-school agriculture program for grades 4 through 8 at the Amy B.H. Greenwell Ethnobotanical Gardens, and has been a garden educator there since. West Hawai‘i students will benefit from her knowledge of indigenous plants, foods, and of traditional Hawaiian agricultural practices.

“I am excited to enhance Holualoa Elementary’s learning garden with native Hawaiian plants and crops,” Meheula-Naihe said. “Learning about Hawaiian ethnobotany with students allows them to gain a deeper sense of place and respect for the intimate relationships between people, land and their practices. Gaining at least some knowledge of traditional landscapes is important for students as they learn how to interact with their environment.”

With Meheula-Naihe’s guidance, school garden teachers in West Hawai‘i will have the opportunity to deepen their students’ connections with ancestral knowledge of agriculture and agrobiodiversity, the ahupua‘a system of natural resource management, and traditional Hawaiian values, protocols, and language. Her expertise will help island students learn to grow and prepare traditional ‘ai pono, or healthy, balanced foods.

“Hawaii County’s R&D department was interested in supporting a school garden specialist with solid knowledge of indigenous crops, traditional farming practices, and a deep connection with

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the ‘aina that sustains us,” said Nancy Redfeather, director of The Kohala Center’s Hawai‘i Island School Garden Network. “The Hickey ‘ohana, a farming family in Holualoa, provided additional support to ensure that a highly qualified and knowledgeable educator would fill this role. We’re grateful for this partnership that will provide the learning garden at Holualoa El with outstanding intellectual leadership and connect West Hawai‘i students with Native Hawaiian plants, foods, and values of aloha ‘aina (love for the land).”

Some of the foods prepared by students will be packaged for the crew of the Malama Honua Worldwide Voyage of the Hokule‘a, Hikianalia, and Makali‘i voyaging canoes, thus connecting keiki to a movement among schools across the islands to support this local, historic effort to advance global sustainability.

By supporting more than 60 school learning gardens on Hawai‘i Island through technical assistance, professional development programs, and mini-grants, The Kohala Center’s Hawai‘i Island School Garden Network connects Hawai‘i’s keiki to real food, healthier eating habits, and the ‘aina itself. The Network also administers FoodCorps Hawai‘i and the statewide Hawai‘i Farm to School and School Garden Hui, both of which work to develop garden and nutrition programs for learning gardens and help schools procure fresh, healthy, locally grown food.

For more information or to volunteer in an Hawai‘i Island school garden, visit The Kohala Center’s website at kohalacenter.org/hisgn or contact Redfeather at nredfeather@kohalacenter.org.

About The Kohala Center

The Kohala Center (kohalacenter.org) is an independent, community-based center for research, conservation, and education. We turn research and ancestral knowledge into action, so that communities in Hawai‘i and around the world can thrive—ecologically, economically, culturally, and socially.