

For Immediate Release

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Educational program trains new farmers and provides on-farm mentorship opportunities

KAMUELA, Hawai‘i—November 3, 2014—A program aimed at beginning farmers and ranchers on Hawai‘i Island is seeking applicants for an upcoming classroom and on-farm mentorship initiative beginning in November.

The Kohala Center’s Beginning Farmer-Rancher Mentorship Program is accepting applications from prospective students for its first cohort. The re-vamped program consists of ten full-day classroom and hands-on sessions held one Saturday per month in Honoka‘a, and 160 hours of on-farm mentorship with a successful farmer or rancher. More information and application materials are available online at <http://kohalacenter.org/farmertraining/mentorship> or by calling The Kohala Center at (808) 887-6411. The deadline to apply is Friday, November 14.

Although no previous farming or ranching experience is required, program applicants must meet the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) definition of a [socially disadvantaged group or a socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher](#) or be a United States military veteran in order to apply. Prospective applicants who have questions about their eligibility are encouraged to contact The Kohala Center. The course covers a wide range of critical subject areas such as soil management, irrigation, composting, cover cropping, and pest management, as well as the “business” side of farming—marketing, accounting, budgeting, and record-keeping. Students who successfully complete the course and create viable farm and business plans will be eligible for additional support services from The Kohala Center, including access to leasable farmland, technical assistance in agricultural businesses development, and guidance through additional support programs administered by the USDA.

The Beginning Farmer-Rancher Mentorship Program represents a unique partnership between The Kohala Center, local government agencies, academic institutions, and leading agricultural professionals. The program is funded primarily by an initiative of the [United States Department of Agriculture](#) that supports outreach and assistance for farmers and ranchers who are socially disadvantaged and/or U.S. veterans.

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The Kohala Center is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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The USDA estimates that 50 percent of farmers in the United States will retire in the next decade. Since 2012, the agency has awarded \$37.2 million in grants to farmer training programs across the country in an effort to enlist and support new farmers and ranchers. “The average age of our farmers is increasing, while the number of farms locally and nationally is declining,” said Nicole Milne, associate vice president for programs at The Kohala Center. “Meanwhile, Hawai‘i imports nearly 90 percent of its food. This program seeks to train new farmers and ranchers—particularly those who may have societal or economic barriers to entering agricultural careers—and move Hawai‘i toward greater food self-reliance and security. By increasing the volume of food grown and produced locally, we can decrease our dependence on imports, create jobs, and diversify Hawai‘i’s rural economy.”

About The Kohala Center

Founded in the year 2000, The Kohala Center (<http://www.kohalacenter.org>) is an independent, community-based center for research, conservation, and education. We turn research and traditional knowledge into action, so that communities in Hawai‘i and around the world can thrive—ecologically, economically, culturally, and socially.

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