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Let's get our keiki into the garden

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You may remember when most of our vegetables and fruit came in cans with colorful labels or were frozen into boxes available in the freezer section of the grocery store. As youngsters, we may have imagined that vegetables came from cans or boxes rather than out of the ground from a garden or farm. The decreasing contact with farms or gardens today promotes an increasing disconnect from the actual source of food for our keiki.

If processed food products are the mainstay of a child's diet, connecting what they eat to plants is a big leap. Experts began thinking this lack of understanding might be a cause for poor eating habits and the obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure prevalent among children today. Many school systems, teachers, parents and community members have decided to encourage schools to start gardens and include classes about growing food in their curricula.

Early results of school gardening programs are encouraging. Children enjoy the chance to be outside, working in the soil. Lessons beyond gardening are being covered in the programs. Information on selecting flavorful plants with nutritional value is often included. Keiki also learn ways to prepare their produce into healthy, delicious meals. Weighing and measuring as part of gardening lessons enhances math skills and many science lessons occur in the classes as well. Social skills are honed as students work cooperatively on projects and good gardening practices develop. Students take their knowledge home to start home gardens and share information about ways to grow, prepare and enjoy healthy fresh food with their families and friends.

A 2012 survey showed that 168 schools in Hawaii had gardening programs involving almost 22,000 students, 830 teachers and 1,500 volunteers. More than 30 acres of school property statewide were being gardened in 2012. The Hawaii Island School Garden Network, a program of the Kohala Center, supports more than 60 gardens here

on the Big Island through technical assistance, professional development programs and grants.

A gathering of those interested in enhancing school gardening programs is organized by HISGN each year. All of the players, as well as new volunteers, are encouraged to attend the seventh Statewide School Garden Symposium with the theme “awakening the senses for deeper learning.” The preliminary meeting, slated Saturday at Hawaii Preparatory Academy in Waimea, will focus on connecting students’ wellness to better academic achievement. Jennifer Ryan, the school coordinator for the Hawaii Department of Health will be a keynote speaker. Joining her will be Carla Hannaford, an expert in the physiology of learning, who will offer ways to encourage deeper learning using the natural environment. Breakout sessions will be held to review research results from projects conducted by 25 school gardening teachers. The meeting goes from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Registration and more information is available at kohalacenter.org.

School Garden Curriculum Workshops continue June 8 conducted by the Kokua Hawaii Foundation. Its Aina School Garden and Nutrition Education curriculum will be reviewed and discussed; attendees will receive copies of the curriculum and supportive materials. More curriculum workshops are planned June 9 to 11 at the Malaai Culinary Garden at Waimea Middle School. These meetings of the third cohort of the Ku Aina Pa School Garden Professional Development Program for teachers will focus on ways school gardening programs can include the national standards for language arts and math — Common Core — and integrate science, technology, engineering and math into a whole lesson. Curriculum planning and practical skills for addressing educational goals with the hands-on experiential learning the gardening programs involve will be reviewed.

More information and registration for all events is available at kohalacenter.org
Tropical gardening helpline

- See more at:

<http://westhawaii.com/news/local-features/let-s-get-our-keiki-garden#sthash.yQLYXQav.dpuf>