

Kūki'o supports youth to pursue careers in agriculture



"Exploring Kohala, connecting with place and culture, learning about agriculture and new plants and animals, learning from inspiring and activated community leaders. These are life changing experiences that can see youth on new paths of stewardship, service and aloha 'āina."

- Dashiell Kuhr, Executive Director

Over the years, the rural community of North Kohala has shown an ever increasing need for agricultural education. Hawai'i Institute of Pacific Agriculture – better known as HIP Ag – a 10 time Kūki'o Community Fund grantee, has filled this position to become the source of hands-on education for Kohala youth interested in agriculture and nutrition education.

Since 2008, HIP Ag has inspired youth to practice regenerative agriculture, focusing their programming on conscious agriculture that honors food sovereignty, indigenous wisdom, and the transformational power of returning to the land. HIP Ag cultivates a diverse collection of Polynesian crops and has recently expanded agricultural courses offered to community and youth to include a post-secondary farm apprenticeship for ninth-grade to early career students. Apprenticeship students exit the program with an agricultural certificate that can be leveraged to attain employment or loans to begin their own operation.

After a three-year hiatus, HIP Ag recently welcomed students back for in-person field trips. The timing couldn't be any better, as HIP Ag recently moved to a new location, expanding its offerings to include old-growth trees and ancient taro growing terraces. For Dean Snelling, Kohala Natural Resource/Agriculture teacher, this program is like no other. "This is really what the kids need. Next year we are going to plan for a field trip at HIP Ag every month.," he says. Echoing his support, a Kohala High School student shared, "This is the best field trip of my life!"

Additionally, since 2019, HIP Ag has led and monitored the Kohala School System's participation in the Garden to Cafeteria (G2C) State pilot program to provide food grown at the school's farm to the Kohala Complex cafeteria.

Over the past eight years, the Kūki'o Community Fund has awarded HIP Ag \$220,500 to support agricultural resiliency, youth engagement, farm mentorships, apprenticeships, and internships, including \$139,000 awarded through Hawai'i Community Foundation's Career Connected Learning Program. The Kūki'o Community Fund has awarded 81 STEM learning programs more than \$1.475M through Career Connected Learning. Learn more at: <https://www.hawaiicommunityfoundation.org/strengthening/kukiofund>



HIP Ag Apprentices excited to grow food for the community