

## Resources for New and Small Farms

There are more farms operating in Hawaii today than there were 20 years ago, when some people prematurely declared agriculture dead. The current number of farms in Hawaii is 7000, as compared to 5500 in 1997.

Fresh, local food production is rebounding, but still far below where it can and should be. Farmer's markets make up a small percentage of local food sales, and various restaurants buy fresh local food, too; but a real game changer will come when school lunches are mostly sourced from Hawaii grown food.

The school lunch program is, effectively, the largest restaurant in the state. The potential to provide local produce, meat, poultry, milk, and fruit to our school children is huge for our local agriculture enterprises. In the last couple years, regulatory barriers and bureaucracy have been reduced to support this goal of scaling up purchases as local production increases.

More land is available for farming since the end of the plantation era, albeit the race is on to save quality lands from speculators and developers. The State of Hawaii recently purchased hundreds of acres of former Dole land in order to preserve them from development pressures and to ensure long term availability and affordability for farming.

Nobody says it is easy to survive and prosper in agriculture, but potential farmers now have planning tools and supporting expertise like never before. The University of Hawaii College of Tropical Agriculture has long been a resource for crop research and agricultural support. What is new are the business planning, hands on experiences and careful mentoring for new farmers, and organizations that help small farmers partner to meet modern regulatory hurdles.

I recently toured a Go Farm Hawaii site and was impressed with how they are coaching up new farming enthusiasts. Go Farm provides increasingly intensive education to anyone interested in becoming a farmer or improving their business model. The education begins with a two-hour seminar called Ag Curious, then continues with Ag Exposure over four Saturdays to teach about the lifestyle and knowledge needed to succeed. Interested participants then graduate to Ag School, a four-month program requiring one evening and one weekend day working on the land.

Students who are still interested in farming after Ag School then move on to Ag Pro, a six month, minimum twice weekly, program, Ag Incubator, a proof of business plan and crop production test for up to three years, and then Ag Business, an intensive, one on one consulting service to help guide the business forward as an agricultural producer. See [GoFarmHawaii.org](http://GoFarmHawaii.org)

The North Shore Economic Vitality Partnership (NSEVP), is a partnership designed to support small farmers succeed and meet the regulatory requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act by providing programs for Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and record keeping, building food hubs, and connecting farmers with additional markets. See [NSEVP.org](http://NSEVP.org)

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