

HAWAII

Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Forestry and Wildlife

Love of the land and service to people are the foundational elements of two model tree projects that Kaulunani, Hawaii's Urban & Community Forestry Program, partnered with in 2021. Both organizations, MA'O Organic Farms and Uluniu, are dedicated to social justice and community empowerment through promoting food security and cultural revitalization.

MA'O Organic Farms (MA'O) is on the west side of O'ahu, in the Wai'anae region. It was traditionally abundant and self-sufficient, as illustrated by archaeological remains of hundreds of acres of terraced food production; however, Wai'anae is now a food desert, home to a population mired in intergenerational poverty fueled by a historic severing of land and people, and perpetuated by a lack of educational attainment and economic opportunities. Wai'anae reflects the challenges faced by Hawai'i at large: a crisis in cost-of-living, the highest per capita homeless population in the nation, a lack of resiliency in the face of climate change, and a vulnerable food system dependent on imports. Native Hawaiians have high rates of preventable diseases, including diabetes, heart disease, and some cancers.



MA'O was established to develop systemic solutions: to empower and educate Wai'anae youth to lead the community to a healthy and prosperous future through the creation of a culturally-rooted sustainable food system that contributes to health and education outcomes while creating a locally vibrant economy.

With support from Kaulunani, MA'O partnered with Aloha Arborist Association (a nonprofit that connects people who care about Hawaii's trees with the knowledge and resources to care for those trees) to train a cadre of young farm interns in basic arboriculture for orchard trees (pruning, pest management, safe tool use, etc.). The

results have been inspiring! Already in the first six months of the year, MA'O produced almost double the amount of orchard fruit as in the same period last year. In addition to increased orchard productivity, the project has enhanced the capacity of youth and promoted food security.

The Uluniu Cultural Agroforestry Project, also located on the west side of O'ahu at the University of Hawai'i West O'ahu, is a creative collaboration that focuses on Indigenous-based tropical agroforestry practices to address food security and cultural revitalization within climate-change needs and conservation priorities. At the center of their work is the niu (coconut), known as the 'tree of life' for its many uses and sacred associations in Hawai'i. With support from Kaulunani and in partnership with more than ten community groups, Uluniu deepened Indigenous agroforestry knowledge and practices across O'ahu; established three coconut nurseries; grew 1200 coconut seedlings; and planted ten dwarf coconuts. In the process, they strengthened relationships with food security practitioners, gardeners, students, faculty, staff, and the wider community, including MA'O, who received 220 coconut seedlings from Uluniu.

The project notes its most important success, however, has been to cultivate and grow the understanding of the true need of kumu niu (coconut trees) as the tree of life, which also strengthens Hawaii's sustainability goals and restores it as a central part of Hawaii's cultural landscape and well-being.



(Left) Desiree Page, Kaulunani Advisory Council Chair and Aloha Arborist Association Chair, instructs MA'O farmer interns on pruning techniques. Photo: Chelsie Onaga

(Right) MA'O farmer interns practice pruning techniques on mango. Photo: Chelsie Onaga