It's been said, “Hope is an embrace of the unknown.”

But reaching for that hope often includes questions, doubts and fears.

Just ask the single mom staring at an empty refrigerator, wondering where her son’s next meal will come from. Ask the fragile kupuna who hasn’t seen his daughter and grandbabies in two months, for fear they may expose him to the horrible virus. Ask Ferdinand, the head of a household of four furloughed hotel workers, including his pregnant daughter who’s expecting in July (read more on page 3).

For those facing extreme adversity, embracing the unknown takes courage, strength and fortitude. It takes resolve, bravery, and believing tomorrow will be a better day – and it will.

We have watched the face of hunger evolve during this pandemic. We’ve seen individuals and families – who never knew what it meant to “be in need” – courageously raise their hands for the first time in their lives. We have also witnessed the sacrifice and dedication of our heroes on the front line. They don masks and gloves just like the superheroes we read about as kids. But this time they’re not caped crusaders – they’re our aunties and uncles. They’re our mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers. They’re even our own sons and daughters.

They’ve shown us hope in action – and so have you.

Since COVID-19 arrived on our shores, Hawaii Foodbank has seen the needs in our communities grow quicker than ever before. The numbers are staggering.

In April, Hawaii Foodbank distributed nearly 2.1 million pounds of food. When compared to the same time last year, this accounts for an 85 percent increase in food distribution on O‘ahu and a 102 percent increase on Kaua‘i.

From there, the numbers continue to grow exponentially. During the first week of May alone, Hawaii Foodbank distributed 681,517 pounds of food on O‘ahu. This comes out to an astounding average of 113,586 pounds of food every day. For comparison, our regular daily distribution is about 40,000 to 50,000 pounds.

While distribution numbers have soared significantly, physical food donations have slowed continued on page 2
down to a trickle — largely in accordance with the “stay at home” order and other public safety guidelines. In order to keep our supply on pace with demand, we’ve had to make emergency food purchases like never before.

During this time of year, Hawaii Foodbank traditionally purchases about $33,000 of food per month. COVID-19 has forced us to pivot. To ensure safe food access remains available for every member of our ‘ohana, we purchased $604,000 of food in March and another $900,000 in April. By June, we anticipate our total food purchases will exceed $3 million. Keep in mind, our annual budget for purchasing food is $400,000.

During each of our recent "Food for Hawaii’s ‘Ohana" distributions with the City and County of Honolulu, Hawaii Community Foundation and Bank of Hawaii Foundation, we’ve been able to serve 4,000 Hawaii households in need. At a recent distribution at Aloha Stadium, more than 83 percent of those served said someone in their home either lost their job or was furloughed due to the pandemic. A percentage like that suggests none of us were fully prepared for COVID-19.

But at the same time, I saw something else during that food distribution — and it makes me believe COVID-19 did not fully prepare for us either.

I saw thousands of people come together as the sun peaked through the gates of Aloha Stadium. The site certainly lived up to its namesake because I’ve never seen so much aloha come together so quickly. For hours, I saw hundreds of volunteers work tirelessly. I felt their strength, compassion and kōkua. I also saw the gratitude radiating from the families in each car. Their faces were hidden behind masks, but it did not matter – I could feel each smile. That’s hope in action.

COVID-19 stands no chance against Hawaii’s hope in action. No questions, doubts or fears can ever live up to the strength of our ‘ohana. Hawaii is finding ways to embrace the unknown, and your strength is providing hope for a better tomorrow. We humbly thank you for your continued trust in our mission. We know our work is far from over. But with your support, we will #RiseResiliently — together.

With respect and aloha,
"Food for Hawaii’s ‘Ohana" Partnerships put food in the hands of those who need it most while supporting local farmers and ranchers

In response to the unprecedented demand on food banks in Hawaii due to the financial consequences of COVID-19, multiple innovative partnerships have been established to provide food assistance to recently unemployed individuals and others who need support.

The City and County of Honolulu, Hawaii Community Foundation and Bank of Hawaii Foundation are partnering with Hawaii Foodbank on an innovative public-private partnership to provide large-scale food assistance throughout O‘ahu. The City and County matched a $1 million donation from the Hawaii Community Foundation’s Hawaii Resilience Fund for COVID-19 relief efforts. The Bank of Hawaii Foundation is also contributing $750,000 for this effort on O‘ahu and $250,000 to feed families on the neighbor islands. All funds from the partnership go directly towards deploying several large-scale “Food for Hawaii’s ‘Ohana” distributions at various locations across O‘ahu.

Four food partners – Hawaii Farm Bureau; Hawaii Foodservice Alliance; Hawaii Ranchers Kaua‘i, Hawai‘i Island, Maui and O‘ahu; and Sysco Hawaii – provide high-quality food products for an estimated 4,000 households on each distribution day.

Similar solutions are also being implemented to serve Kaua‘i’s hungry. The County of Kaua‘i is partnering on a joint program with Hawaii Foodbank Kaua‘i and the Kaua‘i Independent Food Bank to provide 500 food boxes to families in need each Saturday in May.

This program is being administered by the Kaua‘i Incident Management Team; operated by the Department of Parks and Recreation; and supported by the Kaua‘i Police Department, Department of Health and Hawaii National Guard. Alaska Airlines also stepped in with generous donations and support.

“There are no words to adequately express our gratitude and appreciation,” said Ron Mizutani, president and CEO. “These collaborative efforts are an incredible demonstration of what can happen when we all come together. They will not only provide food assistance for the recently unemployed but also give critical financial support to key players in Hawaii’s food economy – and help kickstart a conversation about the importance of local food sources.

Overwhelming joy
How Ferdinand Soriano chooses gratitude over shame

At each “Food for Hawaii’s ‘Ohana” distribution, more than 100 tons of food are provided to about 4,000 households. At first, the mass distribution may appear to be just a vast sea of cars. But take a closer look, and you will see faces – each one with a story to share. Faces like Ferdinand Soriano’s.

For years, Ferdinand made the drive from Waipahu to Kapolei, working as a housekeeper in the hospitality industry. But after tourism shut down in response to COVID-19, Ferdinand was furloughed. The other members of his household – all of whom worked at Marriott’s Ko Olina Beach Club – were also out of work.

Suddenly without income, Ferdinand found himself not knowing how to provide for his household of four, which was soon to become five. His first grandson is expected to join the family in July.

“We were panicking. We started putting our savings towards rent, knowing there would be little left over,” said Ferdinand. “We were even more scared because my daughter is pregnant, and getting nutritious food is critical to the baby’s health.”

But his fears soon turned to hope. He heard about a “Food for Hawaii’s ‘Ohana” distribution on Facebook, and Ferdinand soon found himself making his next morning drive in a new direction – towards Aloha Stadium.

Knowing this could be a shot at relief, he and his wife Leilanie braved the wait.

“It was hard to wait in line, but the feeling of hope carried us through,” recalls Ferdinand. “When we finally made it, we were overwhelmed with joy by the army of volunteers.”

His fears continued to ease as he watched the volunteers load food into his trunk.

“We were in awe. The variety of fresh produce, meat, eggs, bread and dairy – this was the kind of nutritious food my daughter needed,” describes Ferdinand. “I felt my prayers were answered. We were in tears.”

While his tears were hidden behind his sunglasses, Ferdinand’s gratitude illuminated in a way that everyone could see. In times of uncertainty, he teaches us to choose gratitude over shame.

“My family is grateful and not ashamed,” reminds Ferdinand. “It has been a blessing to have those feelings during a time when we were mostly feeling panic, doubt and hopelessness. We are overjoyed, and that excitement has carried us many days.”
He ‘ai ‘ole, he ‘īpuka hāmama.

Food unaccompanied by a voice; a door always open.

by Danny Schlag

The Hawaiian proverb above is from ‘Ōlelo No’eau, and it describes the home of a hospitable person. In this home, the food can be eaten without hearing a complaint from the owners, and the door is never closed to any visitor. At Hawaii Foodbank, it’s a sentiment we hold dear to our mission – and it’s relevant now more than ever.

Since the beginning of the year, COVID-19 has created anxiety, doubt and fear of the unknown. But at Hawaii Foodbank, the door remains open – and our community’s aloha shines through.

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Hawaii Foodbank driver Alan Nohara (pictured left) unloads the first of many truckloads of food at a special “drive-through” distribution held on April 25 at Wai’anae Mall. In collaboration with Wai’anae Coast Comprehensive Health Center, more than 60,000 pounds of food were distributed to families in need.
It’s an ominous task, but we remain undaunted in our role as Hawaii’s leading hunger relief organization—and it’s because of our community’s steadfast support.

Collective Kōkua

It’s now been more than two months since Hawaii’s first positive case of COVID-19, and we’ve taken many steps to increase capacity and maintain the flow of food to those in need. With each step, our dedicated

The Growing Need

COVID-19 has brought on many changes to how we all operate daily, and the effects of the pandemic continue to impact more and more members of our community. Campuses are closed for the school year; restaurants and businesses prepare for a long road to recovery; and countless workers face the reality of layoffs, furloughs and missed paychecks.

The result—many families find themselves turning to Hawaii Foodbank for the first time in their lives.

Since the onset of the pandemic, demand for food assistance in Hawaii has increased by more than 60 percent—and that number continues to rise. Hawaii Foodbank now faces the unprecedented challenge of providing food for those affected by COVID-19 while continuing to support the 1 in 8 Hawaii residents already struggling with hunger.

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Volunteers prepack bags of produce before a “Food for Hawaii’s ‘Ohana” distribution, May 6, at Aloha Stadium (pictured above). Each distribution is the culmination of weeks of collaboration, days of planning and countless hours of volunteer service. One volunteer describes, “It’s a lot of time and hard work. But the moment you hand that food off through the window— that makes it all worth it” (pictured below).

For updates on Hawaii Foodbank’s COVID-19 response efforts, follow @HawaiiFoodbank on social media and use the hashtag #RiseResiliently to be a part of the conversation.
volunteers and food partner agencies have pivoted alongside us – without complaint. Similarly, countless more businesses, organizations and individuals have reached out with an upsurge in support.

This collective kōkua allows us to remain swift in our daily response to hunger, and we’re proud to share a closer look at the impact of our community’s support:

• We’ve implemented new distribution methods like prepacking emergency food boxes and implementing “drive-through” pick-ups. This allows us to serve large quantities of people more efficiently while also maintaining social distance.

• We’re cultivating new partnerships with Hawaii Farm Bureau, the Hawaii Longline Association and others. These initiatives will provide immediate support to local farmers, ranchers and fishermen while also distributing healthy food products to the communities we serve.

• To help provide food assistance to recently unemployed individuals and families in need, we’re collaborating with the City and County of Honolulu, Hawaii Community Foundation’s Hawaii Resilience Fund and Bank of Hawaii Foundation to deploy several large-scale “Food for Hawaii’s ‘Ohana” distributions. Each distribution provides food for approximately 4,000 households. Thanks to the help of our community, these strategies aren’t just options for vulnerable keiki, kūpuna and families in need – they’re vital sustenance.

A Door Always Open

Our community is no stranger to adversity. We’ve seen it before – from Hurricane Iniki and Kīlauea’s eruption to last year’s government shutdown and everything in between. Each time, one thing has alway emerged stronger than any amount of devastation – Hawaii’s strength.

As our mission states – the people of Hawaii are one ‘ohana. And in our family, we always keep the door open for one other. Today is no different, and neither will tomorrow.

Amidst adversity, our community’s aloha always shines through. It has been humbling to witness, and it inspires us to keep going. It’s proven more than a light that shines through our open door; it’s the framework that holds us up altogether.

At Hawaii Foodbank, the door remains open – and our community's aloha shines through. “

Volunteer Elijah Dacanay (pictured left) sorts and packs bags of locally grown bok choy, long beans, papaya and more – part of Hawaii Farm Bureau’s first delivery in partnership with Hawaii Foodbank. Just days later, Kirstin Yale (pictured right) and other members of Hawaii Foodbank’s staff distribute those same bags of produce to hungry kūpuna during a Senior Food Box distribution, April 17, at Sts. Peter & Paul Church.
From farm to foodbank to feeding our ‘ohana
Working to set the stage for long-term food sustainability – during COVID-19 and beyond

COVID-19 has taught us many universal lessons. At the same time, it’s also highlighted the unique challenges found in each country, state, county and community around the globe. For us in Hawaii, one of the largest obstacles of COVID-19 has been our geographic isolation from the rest of the world. This lengthens the time it takes for assistance to arrive during times of need.

Even before Hawaii’s first confirmed case of COVID-19, Hawaii Foodbank made several preemptive food purchases in anticipation of the imposing influx in need. Despite these proactive efforts, it can still take a considerable amount of time for food purchases to arrive from the continental United States – sometimes even six to eight weeks depending on the circumstances.

This reality emphasizes the need to address Hawaii’s issues of long-term food security and sustainability.

Vital food suppliers and local industries including our local farmers, ranchers and fishermen have been drastically affected by restaurant closures, tourism slowdown and other factors related to COVID-19. These circumstances have made us ask ourselves, “What can we do to best support all members of our Hawaii ‘ohana?” What can we do to not only get our communities past COVID-19 but also emerge stronger thereafter?

As Hawaii’s leading hunger-relief organization, Hawaii Foodbank wants to help set the stage for long-lasting food security on our islands and across all facets of the community.

In an effort to contribute to the long-term sustainability of Hawaii while also providing nutritious food to those who need it most, we established innovative partnerships with Hawaii Farm Bureau, the Hawaii Longline Association and others. Hawaii Foodbank has committed to purchase $250,000 in local produce, beef and fish that will be distributed through our programs like ‘Ohana Produce Plus and the Senior Food Box Program.

On the Garden Island, similar efforts are well underway. In March, the County of Kaua‘i launched the “Kūpuna Kare of Farmer Fare” program in collaboration with Hawaii Foodbank Kaua‘i, Kaua‘i Sunshine Market, Mālama Kaua‘i, and the County’s Offices of Elderly Affairs and Economic Development. This program will help support the local economy by purchasing Kaua‘i-grown produce from farmers impacted by the pandemic. Hawaii Foodbank Kaua‘i will then deliver the fresh produce directly to high-risk kūpuna.

Across Hawaii, these initiatives will assist our Local economy during these hard times while also giving our most vulnerable communities access to high-quality, nutritious food.

While COVID-19 has emphasized some of the unique challenges we face as a state, it has also shone a spotlight on Hawaii’s warmth and aloha. These steps toward sustainability are an example of the positive things that can happen when we all work together. The long-term sustainability of our home is critical, and Hawaii Foodbank is committed to being a part of Hawaii’s solution – during COVID-19 and beyond.

On O‘ahu, Hawaii Foodbank staff members Chris Tazono (pictured left) and Wendy Vergara (pictured top right) work to unload and distribute fresh fish and produce as part of new partnerships with the Hawaii Longline Association and Hawaii Farm Bureau. On Kaua‘i, volunteers sort through produce to be delivered as part of the “Kūpuna Kare of Farmer Fare” program (pictured bottom right). These initiatives were created in response to the COVID-19 crisis – in order to provide healthy food to those in need while keeping local farmers, ranchers and fishermen in business.

“Hawaii Foodbank wants to help set the stage for long-lasting food security on our islands and across all facets of the community.”
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