NOURISH 'OHANA

COVID-19 RESILIENCY

Farm to Foodbank

Inside: "Together, We Are Building a More Resilient Hawaii" p. 3 | Food Drive Day, Aug. 15 p. 4
ABOUT

STAFF:

O‘AHU:
2611 Kilihau St., Honolulu, HI 96819
808-836-3600

KAUA‘I:
4241 Hanahao Pl., Ste. 101, Līhu‘e, HI 96766
808-482-2224

QUESTIONS?
808-954-7858
info@hawaiifoodbank.org

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Silver linings and uncharted waters.

I keep asking myself, “Where do I start?”

I have been staring at a blank screen on my desktop for the past hour — struggling to find the right words for my message to all of you.

Understand – I am a man of hope. I will always find positives, even when faced with the most monumental challenge. But I do know there are times in life when being a realist – and being truthful and transparent – is far more important than trying to find a silver lining in desperate and unpleasant situations.

A year ago at this time, I shared with great excitement the expansion of our Food 4 Keiki School Pantry initiative on O‘ahu and Kaua‘i – knowing by adding more schools to the program, we’d be providing not only food but invaluable hope for thousands more keiki and their families. Today, things look so very different. Those same keiki are now preparing for the new school year; but this time, it’s filled with new words, terms and acronyms many of us have never used in our lifetime: quarantine, social distancing, PPE and more.

The COVID-19 crisis has, without question, brought unprecedented needs, and we are bracing ourselves for a long recovery. Since the arrival of COVID-19 in Hawaii in mid-March, Hawaii Foodbank has distributed 10.8 million pounds of food to families in need – a staggering figure in less than four months. Keep in mind, in 2019, we distributed 12 million pounds of food for the entire year.

In order to keep supply on pace with rising demands, we have purchased more than $4.6 million worth of food between March and June. Our regular annual budget is $400,000.

This pandemic has upended our families, our communities and our world; yet, it has also demonstrated just how interconnected we all are.

continued on page 2
Many of our family, friends and neighbors have worked tirelessly to ensure the most vulnerable members of our communities are safe and healthy.

We are inspired every day by examples of ordinary people doing extraordinary things to lift up others – oftentimes helping complete strangers.

From our local organizations (page 3) and our farmers (page 6) to our community as a whole – Hawaii never stops giving by example, and so we are adapting by their example to keep our programs and events like Food Drive Day alive (page 4).

Yes – COVID-19 has tested our patience, our creativity and our strength. It has made us pivot, think out-of-the-box, take notice of how to be more resilient and become better prepared for the unexpected. It has also reminded us of the importance of fairness, kindness, accountability, respect and courage.

No – I am not naïve or too stubborn to see the massive hurdles this pandemic has placed before us. But I am confident we will continue to navigate our way through these uncharted waters, and, in the end, we will be stronger. It is ironic the devastating virus that is tearing up lives right now will eventually bring us closer together. But I firmly believe this will unify us more than we have been in a very long time.

Until that time comes, it is comforting to know you are here. You are an integral part of Hawaii Foodbank’s work and mission, and we appreciate your partnership and support in our efforts to plot a new course for tomorrow.

On behalf of Hawaii Foodbank and the people we serve, I want to express my sincere gratitude – wishing you all good health and happiness. Let’s keep living, and we will #RiseResilently. Together.

With respect and aloha,
"Together, We Are Building a More Resilient Hawaii"

Hawaii’s construction, development and other industries came together to help feed Hawaii’s hungry through a private sector partnership with Hawaii Foodbank. Three food distributions took place in July to support rural residents hit especially hard by COVID-19.

“The demand for food assistance remains extremely high,” said Hawaii Foodbank President and CEO Ron Mizutani. “We’re grateful for this private sector partnership between the construction, development and other industries that will help feed Hawaii’s families during this unprecedented time.”

Four food partners – Hawaii Farm Bureau, Hawaii Foodservice Alliance, H&W Foodservice and Sysco Hawaii – provided more than 257,000 pounds of high-quality food products for a total of 3,250 households. The construction and development industries provided more than $250,000 in funding and volunteers for the food distributions.


“We know that the pandemic and its negative impacts will continue to have an effect on our community for a while,” said Randy Hiraki, president of Commercial Plumbing Inc. “When Mayor Caldwell and Duane Kurisu approached the private sector to step up to help, each company that we asked was honored to play a role in being able to support our households. I want to thank our partners who have generously committed to contributions of time and dollars. We know, however, that the work is not done and hope that others will consider ways to help our community during this difficult time.”

Cannot cancel kōkua

Waikiki SPAM JAM® donates in lieu of festival

The Waikiki SPAM JAM® is a cultural tradition and one of Hawaii’s favorite festivals. Unfortunately, this year’s event was cancelled as a precaution against the spread of COVID-19. Despite these circumstances, the Waikiki SPAM JAM® continued its commitment to the community by holding a Food and Fund Drive in lieu of the festival.

“We missed celebrating Hawaii’s love of SPAM® with our kama‘āina and visitors,” said SJ Foundation President Barbara Campbell. “But we are grateful to the SPAM® brand, Outrigger Hospitality Group, Elite Parking, Queen Emma Land and all the other sponsors for still donating their sponsorship contributions.”

The donation totaled $35,000 in support of Hawaii Foodbank’s COVID-19 response efforts.

Agencies rise resiliently

HHHRC ramps up efforts in response to COVID-19

HHHRC Food Drops have provided much-needed assistance to communities in Kāne‘ohe, Kaka‘ako and Pūpūkea.

From late March to mid June, HHHRC held more than two dozen distributions and distributed more than 450,000 pounds of food – providing critical food assistance to nearly 6,500 families in need.

Hunger knows no bounds. But at Hawaii Foodbank, we know hunger cannot compare to the incredible passion and dedication of our communities. Since the onset of COVID-19, food partner agencies like Hawai‘i Health & Harm Reduction Center have dedicated themselves to serving some of the hardest-hit areas on O‘ahu. HHHRC’s special
Give by Example

Adapt by Example

COVID-19 Resiliency

Join us on Saturday, Aug. 15, for Food Drive Day. It's an annual fundraising event that helps Hawaii Foodbank raise awareness, rally support, and keep our shelves stocked and ready at all times.

On this special day, Hawaii Foodbank staff and volunteers gather food and funds at various donation sites throughout Hawaii. A highly-anticipated, yearly effort — Food Drive Day is Hawaii Foodbank's flagship fundraising event, and it unites our entire community in the fight to end hunger.

Businesses, organizations, groups and individuals are invited to host their own Food and Fund Drives leading up to Food Drive Day and donate their proceeds at a donation site on Saturday, Aug. 15.

This year, COVID-19 may have changed the way it looks, but we are keeping the spirit of Food Drive Day alive.

Since the pandemic’s arrival earlier this year, things have certainly felt uncertain for the people of Hawaii. Example after example, we’ve seen how quickly circumstances can change and even become tumultuous. But we’ve also seen — example after example — how much our community looks out for one another. Let’s take a look.

UH gives by example.

Each spring semester, the University of Hawai‘i holds a Food and Fund Drive in support of Hawaii Foodbank. This year, UH raised more than $56,000 in donations despite having to close campuses for the majority of the campaign. Amid statewide “stay at home” orders, the university pivoted their efforts by implementing virtual giving options, instead. In doing so, they not only continued support during the health crisis, but they also broke their record for fundraising.

“I’m incredibly proud of how our University of Hawai‘i stepped up when so many in our state have needed help the most,” said UH President David Lassner. “This demonstrates once again the amazing generosity and concern for others that characterizes our ‘ohana, and I’d like to thank everyone who participated.”

City Mill gives by example.

Early on during the pandemic, City Mill was recognized as an essential business — allowing the local hardware staple to stay open during the “stay at home” mandate. Recognizing their
position in the community, City Mill quickly launched a “Spare Change” campaign to help those impacted by the outcomes of COVID-19.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has seriously hurt our Hawaii economy with job and business losses, and our entire community is feeling the pain,” said City Mill Vice President Carol Ai May. “As a long-time kama’aina business, we wanted to help our Hawaii ‘ohana.”

City Mill’s “Spare Change” program encouraged customers to round up their purchases to the nearest dollar and donate their change to Hawaii Foodbank. Conceived by City Mill Director of Business Development Evan Killips, the campaign ran from April 20 to June 21. It was a true example of community synergy, as the accumulated customer “round-ups” helped total $75,000 – proving that every penny really does count.

Added Killips, “We were and continue to be heartbroken seeing the long lines forming for food distribution as a result of COVID-19. Food security is such an important need, and we are so grateful for the opportunity to give back to the community that has supported us over the years.”

Max Holloway gives by example.

Prior to his championship fight at UFC 251 on July 11, Max Holloway announced that he would auction off his fight kit with all proceeds going to Hawaii Foodbank. The bout at Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, resulted in a controversial split decision loss, where many considered Holloway the clear winner. Regardless, Holloway chose not to dwell on the results. Instead, the Wai’anae native used his platform to shift focus back to the issue of hunger in Hawaii.

“My people, they need to eat in Hawaii ... The unemployment rate in Hawaii is one of the highest rates in the nation,” said Holloway. “I’m here to support the people who support me – where I come from. If I got food on my table, it’s only right to help put food on people’s table that aren’t getting a fair shake ... So, I’m just trying to help in whatever way I can.”

Holloway’s fight kit sold for more than $21,000, and the fighter additionally donated a portion of proceeds from a limited edition t-shirt sale. When it comes to Max Holloway, there is no doubt that a champion’s spirit is what it is.

The people of Hawaii continue to give by example. **Food Drive Day this year will adapt by their example.**

From individual donations to large-scale corporate campaigns to everything in between, our entire community continues to give by example – responding to turbulence with passion, positivity and perseverance. Similarly, Hawaii Foodbank has had to adjust its own operations in order to meet the increased demands of the pandemic.

“COVID-19 has forced us to make many pivots this year – particularly we’ve had to purchase more food than ever before,” said Hawaii Foodbank President and CEO Ron Mizutani. “Since March, we’ve purchased more than $4.6 million worth of emergency food. Keep in mind, our typical annual budget for food purchase is $400,000.”

“We’re grateful that we’ve been able to make these adjustments and maintain the flow of food,” added Mizutani. “However, this kind of purchasing isn’t sustainable.”

**Hawaii Foodbank’s mission depends on food donations from the community, and Food Drive Day is an integral pillar of the organizational model** – especially in regards to emergency preparedness. Even prior to the pandemic, Food Drive Day was strategically moved to August this year in order to better stabilize Hawaii Foodbank’s inventory. The goal is to improve the year-round food supply and better prepare vulnerable communities for hurricane season, natural disasters and other unexpected events like COVID-19.

“COVID-19 has highlighted the need for us to always be prepared," said Hawaii Foodbank Director of Food Drive and Events Beverly Santos. “Throughout this pandemic, our community has supported our mission every step of the way. Their kōkua is unwavering, and so we found it important to also remain diligent in our efforts to adapt Food Drive Day this year.”

“Food Drive Day plays such an integral role in maintaining our food supply – especially in preparation for hurricane season. We owe it to the people who support us and the communities we serve to do everything we can to keep Food Drive Day going this year.”

In order to be sensitive to the current health climate, Food Drive Day is most notably adapting this year by implementing new “drive-through” giving methods at donation sites. This will limit physical contact and practice social distancing guidelines. There will also be an increased emphasis on Virtual Food Drives this year.

To see how you can get involved on Food Drive Day and to find a donation site near you, visit HawaiiFoodbank.org.
Fanny Gan and Xian Xing Huang humbly began farming to provide a better life for their children (Fanny Gan pictured far left with son Tony). They’ve succeeded in providing that — and so much more. Today, they’re providing nourishment and hope during a global pandemic.

Despite the challenges surrounding COVID-19, the local Waiʻanae farm never stopped planting. They’ve creatively shifted operations to provide continued sustenance in multiple forms — jobs for their 35 employees (pictured throughout) and food for Hawaii’s hungry families, individuals, keiki and kūpuna.

A Waiʻanae family farm provides sustenance over subsistence amid COVID-19 pandemic

Story by RON MIZUTANI
Photographs by DANNY SCHLAG
Hawaii farmers often talk about the fragility of slim margins. It is a constant uphill battle that many cannot survive. A farmer is the only person in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale and pays the freight both ways. No one farms to make millions.

The agriculture industry had already forecasted tight profit margins in 2020, but when COVID-19 arrived on Hawaii’s shores in early March, meeting those projected numbers was no longer the immediate priority. Health and safety took center stage.

“First thing we did was plan guidelines and protocols to prevent anyone in our family business to be exposed to COVID-19. We didn’t want anyone get sick,” said Tony Wong Cam of Huang Basil Products. “As business slowed down, we asked ourselves, ‘How are we going to deal with it? Do we still keep planting?’ It all happened so sudden, but we knew people still needed food.”

The Huang family chose not to plow their products back into the soil and kept working – hoping something would surface.

That something happened in mid-April when Hawaii Foodbank announced a new, strategic partnership with Hawaii Farm Bureau. In response to the COVID-19 health crisis and in line with its ongoing efforts to ensure the longterm sustainability of Hawaii’s food assistance system, Hawaii Foodbank committed to purchasing $200,000 in local agricultural products for its food distribution programs. Hawaii Foodbank recognized the importance of keeping Hawaii’s farmers farming, and the partnership provided a new way to get high-quality, nutritious food to some of Hawaii’s most vulnerable communities.

“We are grateful to Hawaii Foodbank in partnering with us on this latest initiative to assist the community during these challenging economic times,” said Hawaii Farm Bureau Executive Director Brian Miyamoto. “These food purchases by Hawaii Foodbank will provide much needed income to farmers and ranchers and allow them to continue their operations. In turn, this partnership ensures these locally-grown food products are distributed to families who are really in need.”

Huang Basil Products was one of those farms that was prepared and immediately ready to supply food. Since mid-April, Hawaii Foodbank has purchased more than $19,000 worth of fresh produce from the farm, including 21,320 pounds of pak choy and kai choy.

“Thanks to Hawaii Foodbank, we kept planting, and we were able to keep our 35 employees working,” said company matriarch Fanny Gan. “With Hawaii Foodbank’s help, none of our employees filed for unemployment. We are so happy, and we hope this program can continue to help farmers. The sales went down so much, but the percentages are

continued on page 8
HARRY C. & NEE CHANG C. WONG FOUNDATION
FOOD DROP OFF

continued from page 7

getting better. For me, I really rely on the food bank, and I believe other farmers are, too.”

Fanny Gan smiles when she looks back at the farm’s roots – back when she started farming in 1997 with her husband Xian Xing Huang. She admits she knew very little about living off the land, but she wanted to support her husband’s dream.

“I just needed something to do with the skills my husband had. He’s the one who chose farming,” she says of their humble start on a two-acre lot in Wai’anae. “After working all those years, I’ve learned little by little, and now I enjoy it because I know we’re providing food for a lot of people.”

Over the next 20 years, the family expanded operations and diversified their crops to include choy sum, green onions, Chinese parsley, mustard cabbage, cilantro and eventually fresh herbs. Today, they have more than 40 acres of farmland in the Wai’anae Valley.

Tony recently returned home to help his parents keep their dream alive and brought with him fresh ideas and new energy. But one thing did not change – his family’s commitment to their Wai’anae community.

“When they began, my parents saw a need to provide for me and my siblings. Now, they are providing food and sustenance for many people,” says Tony. “The biggest challenge in agriculture is cost of land and labor. And when you add the cost of living, margins get even slimmer, so you have to be more creative how you do business.”

While Tony believes creativity and staying relevant are important, he also knows believing in what you do is what truly brings success.

“When COVID-19 hit, our operation of planting remained normal because we believed. We never stopped believing. And when Hawaii Foodbank wanted product, we were ready,” says Tony. “The program really supports local farmers, and the extra demand for locally desired vegetables is something we really appreciate. It has not been easy, but hearing how people are receiving our products makes my mom and dad very happy. They feel like they are giving back.”

Noodle Fest Hawaii
Due to concerns over COVID-19 and the safety of public gatherings, the 3rd annual Noodle Fest Hawaii was postponed until next year. However, this did not stop presenting sponsor Sun Noodle from donating an entire pallet of food to Hawaii Foodbank. The donation included 80 cases – in four different flavors – of their popular Wiki Wiki Noodles. Save the date for next year’s Noodle Fest, scheduled for March 27, 2021.

Kaua’i Island Utility Cooperative
The Kaua’i Island Utility Cooperative donated 700 pounds of rice to Hawaii Foodbank Kaua’i in place of its traditional rice giveaway at its Annual Membership Meeting. “Rice is a huge staple in our local culture here – making it one of our top most requested items,” said Hawaii Foodbank Kaua’i Director Wes Perreira. “This donation helps tremendously because rice is normally one of the things our food bank has to buy on a regular basis.”
Help Our Communities #RiseResiliently in the Wake of COVID-19

Hawaii Foodbank
2611 Kilihau St.
Honolulu, HI 96819
808-836-3600
HawaiiFoodbank.org

In this time of increased hunger, your community needs your help. Please join us on Food Drive Day by dropping off non-perishable food at one of our drive-through donation sites or making an online donation. To find a donation site near you, visit HawaiiFoodbank.org/Food-Drive-Day.

Give by example.
Sweetie Pacarro
Radio Host, KSSK

FOOD DRIVE DAY Saturday, Aug. 15

We can end hunger one helping at a time.

HUNGER ACTION MONTH

NOURISH ‘OHANA
HAWAII FOODBANK NEWSLETTER

SUMMER & FALL 2020
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