From disruption to sustainable transition, a silver lining of the pandemic has been the streamlined collab between a local farm hub and Hawai’i Foodbank.
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CONNECT WITH US!
Aloha mai kākou,

With grocery prices reaching record highs, and the pandemic still disrupting work, school and life – it seems the challenges never end.

For too many members of our ‘ohana, getting food on the table has been incredibly difficult lately. More than a hundred thousand Hawai‘i residents are still turning to Hawai‘i Foodbank as they try to feed their families.

At the same time, farmers, retailers and food distributors have extra produce and groceries sitting in fields and warehouses, but they can’t move all of it.

Why? Fresh fruit may be irregularly shaped and can’t be sold at your local supermarket. Or a box of cereal is nearing its sell-by date and can’t be sold in stores – even though it is still nutritious and safe to eat. Add to this the current economic crisis and heightened disruptions to the supply chain, it’s no wonder that food waste is becoming an increasingly big problem worldwide.

Nearly 66 billion pounds of food is wasted in the United States every year. Locally, that’s more than half a billion pounds of food that might not reach the dinner tables of families at risk of hunger. This comes out to almost 1.5 million pounds of food waste per day across the islands – more than 26 percent of the available food supply. Hawai‘i residents throw away approximately one quarter of all food and beverage purchases, which equates to a loss of about $700 per person per year. This accumulative food waste has a big impact on our community, our local economy and our environment.

As Hawai‘i’s leading hunger-relief organization, part of Hawai‘i Foodbank’s mission is to help set the stage for long-lasting food security on our islands and across all facets of the community.

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Prior to COVID-19, we were already working with Feeding America, Hawai‘i Farm Bureau, and other local stakeholders – planting seeds to help create policies that will better support Hawai‘i agriculture and long-term food sustainability initiatives. A bright spot to come out of the pandemic has been how the virus catapulted these conversations into fruition.

Recognizing the importance of keeping Hawai‘i’s farmers farming during the early stages of the pandemic, we established a new, strategic partnership with Hawai‘i Farm Bureau – allowing us to purchase high-quality agricultural products directly from local farmers that are then distributed through our programs like ‘Ohana Produce Plus. It’s even allowed us to launch new initiatives like our Kūpuna Fresh pilot program, which aims to provide seniors in need with more access to local fresh fruits and vegetables.

This collaborative effort offers an unequivocal win-win-win scenario. It allows us to provide more healthy, nutritious food to local families in need while limiting food waste and supporting the local economy and agriculture. These kinds of initiatives are an important step towards strengthening our food systems and creating a healthier, more resilient Hawai‘i.

We recognize that none of this is possible without your continued support, and we thank you for helping sustain our mission. I’m a firm believer that we’re stronger together, and I am reminded of that each day when I come into the warehouse. When I look around, I am blown away to always see so many people – our staff, volunteers, donors, partners and many more – working hard to take care of others.

We have the unique opportunity and ability to solve problems here in Hawai‘i, so let’s show everyone else how it’s done, by being better connected and coordinated in our work. Let’s continue to move forward – together.

With gratitude and aloha,

Amy Marvin
Hawai‘i Foodbank President and CEO
"Give Blood. End Hunger."
Blood Bank of Hawai‘i donates more than 9,000 meals to Hawai‘i Foodbank

For the second year in a row, Blood Bank of Hawai‘i partnered with Hawai‘i Foodbank to “Give Blood. End Hunger.” During the months of December and January, Blood Bank of Hawai‘i committed to match every blood donation with a meal to Hawai‘i Foodbank. As a result, blood donors could spread the impact of their donation over multiple causes – not only helping to save up to three lives for hospital patients across the state but also helping to fight hunger in their local community.

During the two-month campaign, Blood Bank of Hawai‘i provided 9,156 meals to Hawai‘i Foodbank and 437 meals to The Food Basket on Hawai‘i Island. This year’s total represents 125 more meals than in 2021, which is a great accomplishment given the climate of blood bank shortages across the United States early this year due to the holidays, bad weather and the COVID-19 Omicron surge.

Todd Lewis, chief operating officer at Blood Bank of Hawai‘i, says navigating this campaign during the ongoing pandemic was tricky but attributes success to the community’s collaborative efforts.

“Healthy blood supply is keeping first time blood donors coming in at all times. But due to the pandemic, we had to shut down all high school and college drives,” explains Lewis. “Campaigns like ‘Give Blood. End Hunger.’ helped to fill that void. We’re incredibly grateful and delighted for our partnership with Hawai‘i Foodbank. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we still had a record turnout.”

Grateful to Give Back
Kekaha pastor finds multiple ways to support Hawai‘i Foodbank Kaua‘i

Pastor Darryl Kua is one of the good things about Kaua‘i. He truly has a giving heart, never seeking recognition for serving his community. He wholeheartedly believes in the mission of Hawai‘i Foodbank and works hard to help those in need on Kaua‘i.

Pastor Darryl and Westside Christian Center started volunteering in 2018 in response to the devastating storms that left communities flooded for months. After seeing so many homes destroyed, businesses lost and families in need of help, Pastor Darryl and his congregation reached out to Hawai‘i Foodbank Kaua‘i to provide additional labor. And they haven’t slowed down since.

This last year, the Westside congregation has collectively donated nearly 1,500 hours of volunteer service. When they are not volunteering at the warehouse, their team is busy running their own food pantry and providing deliveries of hot meals, grocery bags and senior food boxes to those in need. They have also participated in numerous large-scale, emergency food distributions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

More than anything, Pastor Darryl is grateful for the opportunity to give back and motivate young members of his congregation.

“It’s been a great opportunity to have the teens learn the value of giving back. Many of our volunteers have been recipients of food from our food pantry, and some are homeless or have been homeless,” says Pastor Darryl. “This gives them a sense of purpose and provides a way to give back to those who help them. Volunteering has also opened their eyes to all the work that goes into getting the food to those that need it, and it helps them to appreciate it even more.”
Saleh Azizi (pictured above, lower left) came to Hawai‘i in 2006. He obtained his doctorate at the University of Hawai‘i. He discovered Kahumana Farms while doing research for his dissertation. Through his experiences living in Hawai‘i, Africa, Sweden, Iraq and all over the world, Saleh developed an affinity for helping others. “I met a lot of people. I could see the hardship, and that’s when I started feeling that I wanted to help people in rural areas, and then agriculture became the method. But my inspiration and motivation was always to help vulnerable communities,” says Saleh. “And so, Hawai‘i became kind of the perfect place for that. To me, I fell in love with the multiculturalism, and I immediately felt the great compassion of people here. When I experienced that, I really felt at home and accepted in a way that I hadn’t ever before.”

Today, Saleh Azizi manages special projects for Kahumana Farms, which regularly helps provide opportunities to a growing number of employees (pictured throughout) and more than 80 growers in the community. Saleh also serves as Food Hub Hui coordinator for the Hawai‘i Good Food Alliance.

Hub GRUB

From disruption to sustainable transition, a silver lining of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the streamlined collaboration between Kahumana Farms and Hawai‘i Foodbank

Story and photographs by DANNY SCHLAG
Over the last two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the stability of food systems worldwide. In Hawai‘i, the pandemic quickly exposed the vulnerability of the state’s long-term food security and self-sustainability.

As organizations and governments worked feverishly to maintain food supply chains and accessibility, an innovative partnership stepped in to fill the gap.

In April 2020, Hawai‘i Foodbank announced a strategic partnership with Hawai‘i Farm Bureau by committing to purchase $200,000 in local agricultural products that would then be distributed through the non-profit’s food assistance programs. In the first six months of the partnership, Hawai‘i Foodbank more than tripled its initial commitment — investing more than $750,000 in locally grown produce while supporting 19 Hawai‘i farms in the process. For many of the farmers, this helped sustain operations during the pandemic and offset losses from the closed-off tourism industry, which normally exists as the most substantial component of the local agricultural market.

For Kahumana Farms on O‘ahu, Hawai‘i Foodbank became their main customer during this time. And suddenly, the farm hub found itself emerging as a community necessity through their provision of essential services to vulnerable populations struggling with hunger.

It was a natural relationship for the Wai‘anae-based, mission-driven farm hub. “Hawai‘i Foodbank has been able to support Kahumana Farms not just as a farm but also as an organization,” explains Saleh Azizi, farm hub manager at Kahumana Farms. “As an organization, we have a mission of change, and the Foodbank has been so important in supporting that mission — and that is to create a more food secure Hawai‘i.”

Food hubs like Kahumana Farms aim to achieve food security and sustainability by helping connect small farmers with local markets while increasing food access for local residents. Food hubs are an emerging, innovative approach to aggregating and distributing locally grown food, and Kahumana Farms has been a key player in the movement towards integrating community supported agriculture in Hawai‘i.

The farm hub was established in 2017 with support of the Hawai‘i Department of Agriculture and a USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant. Saleh, who had already been working on the farm for several years in various roles, was hired to manage the farm hub’s mission and operations. He immediately began pounding the pavement – literally knocking on doors where he could see fruit trees flourishing in folks’ backyards.

“People kind of thought I was crazy. They said, ‘Are you knocking on doors in Wai‘anae?’ And I said, ‘Yeah. That’s what we’re going to do. Whatever it takes. Whatever it takes to get this thing continued on page 6
started,’” remembers Saleh. “That’s when I met Betty, and that’s how the food hub started.”

Saleh can’t help but smile as he reflects on the farm hub’s humble beginnings. He attributes much of the early growth to his friend Betty Kaneshiro, who became one of the food hub’s first members.

“Betty lived in Mākaha, and she would grow these beautiful bananas, squash, grapefruit — so many things that she grew right in her backyard,” says Saleh. “In her own yard, she would consistently produce more bananas and squash than a single, nearby store could take. So, we became her support. We said, ‘You bring everything here, and we’ll help you sell everything. And we’ll try to pay you more than what you’re receiving currently.’ When Betty saw that this was really something, she began spreading the word in the community — and that went a long way.”

When people heard the hub could facilitate food security by offering a larger customer base, it spread by word of mouth to serve roughly 80 small growers in the community. Already, the food hub was beginning to remove barriers — helping growers and farmers gain access to new markets and helping consumers gain access to fresh, local foods.

“That was how things operated for a long time. It was us supporting nearby people that grew mostly fruits — breadfruit, citruses, avocados, mangoes out here in the community,” describes Saleh. “But much of that and how our food hub operated took a change during COVID. That’s the start of a very different story.”

When the pandemic surfaced, many of the larger farms in the area lost their primary markets as a result of closures to restaurants, hotels, stores and fresh food markets like those found in Chinatown.

“When the pandemic happened, we had the opportunity to jump in and help them. And that went hand in hand with us being able to fulfill larger orders — like with the Foodbank’s community food distributions,” says Saleh. “Hawai’i Foodbank coming in and ordering more from us actually ended up helping save those farmers, and it helped us operate on a larger scale than ever before. We went through incredible increases from helping sell and distribute roughly 150,000 pounds of produce before COVID-19 to 700,000 pounds of local produce today.”

In the first year of their partnership, Hawai’i Foodbank purchased more than 207,000 pounds of fresh, local fruits and vegetables from Kahumana Farms. This means that nearly 30% of the farm hub’s distribution went to support local keiki, kūpuna and families in need of assistance.

“These immense increases benefitted everyone. It benefitted people receiving food and the farmers. They’re going to work feeling confident and safe. And it benefitted people for employment. We started hiring more people, and it’s been quite the morale booster for employees knowing that they’re serving people in our own communities,” reflects Saleh. “Things began happening within our mission that we had hoped for, for years. And also, the response from the public, it was sort like that saying, you know? ‘Build it and they will come.’ Honestly, before COVID-19, we didn’t know the food hub was going to be such a thing. We hoped for it. But after COVID-19, we knew. It was like the food hub became a successful proof of concept, and then it also connected us with all the other food hubs in Hawai’i. And everybody got stronger together.”

Stronger together. So much so that the success of this partnership has enabled Hawai’i Foodbank to expand upon its own programs, as well. In 2021, Hawai’i Foodbank launched a new pilot program called Kūpuna Fresh. The initiative aims to provide more local, fresh produce to seniors in need of food assistance, and the majority of produce comes directly from Kahumana Farms. In the program’s first year, the food hub supplied the Kūpuna Fresh program with nearly 43,000 pounds of nutritious, Hawai’i-grown produce.

For Saleh, this partnership helps vindicate his conviction that community supported agriculture can play a vital role in Hawai’i’s food ecosystem.

“To establish a local food distribution system as part of making a more food secure Hawai’i — Hawai’i Foodbank has been a big part of this for us,” says Saleh. “There’s been no other organization that has supported us this much. It’s been absolutely game-changing. It’s allowed us to achieve a lot of the goals towards sustainability that we’ve wanted for a long time. There have been many, many benefits that have happened in local farming, and the food and agricultural community is better because of Hawai’i Foodbank’s involvement.”
Commitment to accountability
Hawai‘i Foodbank earns coveted four-star rating from Charity Navigator

For its demonstration of strong financial health along with its commitment to accountability and transparency, Hawai‘i Foodbank attained its 12th consecutive four-star rating from non-profit evaluator Charity Navigator. This is Charity Navigator’s highest possible rating, indicating that Hawai‘i Foodbank adheres to the sector’s best practices and executes its mission in a financially efficient way.

“We are so honored to receive this rating and proud to know that we are providing services for the people of Hawai‘i in the best way possible,” says Amy Marvin, president and CEO of Hawai‘i Foodbank. “We will continue to find new ways to improve our organization and fulfill our mission with integrity, humanity and aloha.”

Charity Navigator evaluates 1.5 million charities in the United States. Only 1% of the charities evaluated have received at least 12 consecutive four-star evaluations, which shows that Hawai‘i Foodbank outperforms the majority of charities in America. This exceptional designation sets the organization apart from its peers while demonstrating its trustworthiness to the public.

As non-profit organizations evolve, so do the desires and interests of their supporters. With many donors yearning for greater accountability, transparency and concrete results, a four-star rating from Charity Navigator allows for greater confidence in the charitable decisions they make and the non-profit sector as a whole.

Charity Navigator rating, certifications and other important designations, visit HawaiiFoodbank.org/reports.

Walmart Līhu‘e
Through a partnership with Walmart that enables keiki to learn early writing skills, Hawai‘i Foodbank Kaua‘i distributed nearly 40,000 boxes of crayons to elementary schools and preschools such as A Room to Grow Preschool in Līhu‘e. “We are grateful to Hawai‘i Foodbank Kaua‘i for helping us distribute the crayons to public schools across Kaua‘i,” says Diane Keeler, store manager at Walmart Līhu‘e. “We hope our donation of crayons inspires some young artists across the island.”

T S Restaurants
T S Restaurants donated $8,000 to Hawai‘i Foodbank in support of the organization’s mission to end hunger in Hawai‘i. The funds were raised through T S Restaurants’ eight Hawai‘i locations as part of a Thanksgiving promotion. Participating restaurants included Duke’s Waikīkī and Hula Grill Waikīkī on O‘ahu; Kimo’s, Leilani’s on the Beach, Hula Grill Ka‘anapali and Duke’s Beach House on Maui; Duke’s Kaua‘i and Keoki’s Paradise on Kaua‘i. All funds raised stayed on each island.
Employee engagement is key when it comes to increasing productivity, enhancing work quality and retaining top talent. A community give-back program is a good place to start. Here are five steps to engaging employees in a cause.

1. Identify a cause or organization to support.

There are nearly 9,000 non-profit organizations in Hawai‘i – ranging from areas like social services, culture and arts, environmental causes and many more. Many organizations choose to work with charities where they can make the biggest, most immediate impact. Some choose to work with non-profits that their leadership actively supports. Others poll their staff for additional buy-in.

2. Determine the scope of your involvement.

Volunteer opportunities run the gamut from internal fundraisers and donation programs to community service projects, days of service and more. Will this be a one-time program or a year-long initiative? It will be important to set goals and assign a point person to liaise with the non-profit.

3. Rally your team.

Get your employees excited by hosting a kick-off event and keep them energized by providing incentives. Invite a representative from the designated non-profit to share information about their organization.

4. Make it fun.

Consider a theme and encourage participation with some friendly competition. We have seen a lot of creative theme ideas at Hawai‘i Foodbank, such as “Spread the Love” asking for donations of nut spreads and “Rainbow Drives” asking for donations of different colored foods every week.

5. Close the loop.

Report back to the staff the impact of their involvement. Schedule a celebration event, write an article for the company newsletter and promote via social media. Employees love to see the type of impact their participation has made.
NOURISH OUR ‘OHANA

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In this time of increased hunger, your community needs your help. For families across Hawai‘i, your donation gives more than just food. It provides nourishment and hope. By making a gift today, your support goes a long way. Just $10 helps provide food for more than 20 meals.

Max Holloway
Professional MMA Fighter and Hawai‘i Foodbank Ambassador

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