

### **Celebrating Food Day at UH Manoa!**

Food and nutrition are essential to our health and existence however, nutritious foods aren't always readily available or affordable, and the food choices we make don't always support good health. Food day is a national event that promotes healthy eating, as well as sustainable farms and increases awareness of local food sources. According to the official Food Day website, Food Day is a grassroots campaign, created by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) to address a variety of issues related to health, nutrition, hunger, agricultural policy, animal welfare, and farm worker justice. The ultimate goal is to "strengthen and unify the food movement in order to improve the nation's food policies". Other goals of the organization include promoting safer and healthier diets, supporting sustainable and organic farms, reducing hunger, reforming factory farms to protect the environment and farm animals, and supporting fair working conditions for food and farm workers. Food Day occurs annually on October 24<sup>th</sup> with the mission of engaging participation in the nationwide celebration and movement towards more healthy, affordable, and sustainable food. The University of Hawaii at Manoa's second annual Food Day event was consistent with the CSPI's mission for food day.

Hawaii has an ideal agricultural climate (Ozer, 2007) yet approximately 90% of Hawaii's food supply is imported (Maddock et al., 2012). The lack of support for our local agriculture and support for agribusinesses outside of Hawaii, has contributed to high food costs and the potential decrease in our foods nutritional value over the distance of travel. It is estimated that in Hawaii, the cost of monthly meals prepared at home for a family of four is about \$1,016, compared to the rest of the United States who's costs are a lot lower, at \$796 per month. Studies have found that communities in Hawaii vary in their access to supermarkets, farmer's markets and public transportation. (Maddock et al., 2012). Therefore the issues of high food costs and lack of access are of concern as adequate nutritious food may be less available and affordable for families to

obtain. The high reliability on imported food is also of concern because in the event of a natural disaster, war, or any other scenario that could prevent the import of food, would create a mass food shortage and therefore lead to food insecurity (Yee, 2012).

Food insecurity is defined as the limited ability to acquire an adequate quality of food in socially acceptable ways (Boyle, 2013). According to the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), 58,000 households (13.1%) in Hawaii were food insecure based on a three-year average between 2008 and 2010 with 22,000 households (5%) having very low food security. Food security exists when “all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (WHO, 2012). Therefore in very low food security the eating patterns of a household would be disrupted, and food intake reduced due to a lack of resources (Boyle, 2013). Food availability, food access, and food use are all building blocks of food security. Food availability is described as having sufficient quantities of food available on a consistent basis, while food access is explained as having sufficient resources to acquire appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Finally, food use is described as the appropriate use of food centered on the knowledge of basic nutrition, care, adequate water, and sanitation (WHO, 2012). It is important to be aware of the issues related to food insecurity and work towards maintaining the three building blocks mentioned to ensure that the people of Hawaii are food secure. It is evident that the problem of hunger exists in Hawaii due to high costs and lack of access as discussed. Therefore efforts are needed to be made to move Hawaii towards a more self-sustainable food system to ensure that the people of Hawaii have an adequate supply of nutritious food, at affordable costs, and at all times so that they can thrive and be healthy in their everyday lives.

In ancient Hawaii, complex agricultural systems enabled communities to work together in providing an adequate food supply with no reliance on outside food sources. Although the

population of Hawaii has significantly grown since then, the advances in technology and increased knowledge of sustainable agriculture provides a route for producing sufficient locally grown food to the people of Hawaii (Maddock et al., 2012). Unfortunately, the re-zoning of agricultural lands for urban development has steered us away from a once self-sustainable food system and the awareness of supporting locally grown food has decreased (Yee, 2012). Locally grown food offers numerous benefits including the increased health associated with eating more fresh and natural whole foods (Ozer, 2007). Food would also be more affordable and without the added expense of importation. There is a need for Hawaii's community to come together and help build our local food system, and Food Day is just one effort that strives to increase awareness by creating community connectedness and offering a sense of place to discuss these issues related to food.

Food day targets people from all walks of life. The agency strives to bring together a broad range of people to participate and coordinate food day events around the world. In an effort to get involved locally, a food day event was coordinated and celebrated at the University of Hawaii at Manoa (UH Manoa) hosted by the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) department of Human Nutrition, Food and Animal Science (HNFAS). The UH food day event was lead by Dr. Corilee Watters, PhD, RD, and nutrition professor. The ultimate goal was to increase the awareness of the connection between food, agriculture, and health. Another goal was to increase awareness of local food sources while promoting healthy eating and supporting sustainable farms, pushing for healthy, affordable food produced in a sustainable humane way in Hawaii. The theme of this years UH Food Day event was "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Fish". Going with the theme, another goal was to promote the consumption of fish. The objectives of the event was to (1) have presentations on nutritional health, agriculture (focused on aquaculture/aquaponics), and food, (2) educate the audience about

the health benefits of eating fish whether wild caught or farm raised, and (3) promote the event to a broad population, including students and faculty of various disciplines not just within CTAHR, but also throughout the campus. This is why the event was held at the campus center executive dining room, a mutual place that all people on campus can access on a daily basis. The event was also promoted to people off-campus.

This year's UH Food Day event served approximately 120 people. Attendees of the event represented a variety of disciplines and demographics including college students (health, law, nutrition, food science, etc.), professionals, and even a group of 15 high school students along with their teacher from the University Laboratory public charter school. This data was obtained by collecting contact information written on slips that entered the attendees in a drawing for a raffle prize at the end of the event. According to the food day website, thousands of Americans were served by this event with over 3,200 food day events implemented in 2012. In planning the event, Dr. Corilee Watters, initiated the process in creating the theme and developing the goals/objectives mentioned to start organizing the guest speakers, vendors, and other logistics of the event. The need to promote the event along with helping to plan other aspects is where I was able to get involved as a student organizer. The event was also promoted as a part of the Sodexo Sustainability Challenge. With the collaboration of UH Manoa's Sodexo General Manager and R.D. Donna Ojiri, food vendors were organized and the executive dining room was booked and equipped with the important AVI equipment for the event. Initially I met with both Dr. Watters and Donna Ojiri to discuss the overview of responsibilities in promoting and planning a successful food day event. A trip was then taken the following week to meet farmer Fred Lau and tour the aquaponic section of his farm, Mari's Gardens. The farm is a "hidden gem" in Mililani Town and is primarily a plant nursery but provides the freshest and most sustainably grown produce possible, including Manoa lettuce and green onions that can be found in your

local grocery stores such as Down to Earth, Whole Foods and at the Kailua Farmers market. One acre of land is dedicated to aquaculture and the large-scale use of commercial aquaponics. A picture was then taken including Dr. Watters, Fred Lau, Sodexo Executive Chef Philip Shon and myself, showcasing Mari's Garden in the background, to be included in the flyer for the promotion of the event.

My duties from then on consisted of promoting the event by assisting Dr. Watters in writing articles for newsletters and emails, creating flyers for a campus mail out; smaller flyers to be passed out at previous events leading to October 24<sup>th</sup>, encouraging people to RSVP, coordinating an interview with UH Manoa's campus newspaper the "Ka Leo" to have an article published a week before the actual event, creating drafts of power points for a featured guest speaker, creating signage for the event, and coordinating other volunteers from the FSHN council to help out on Food Day. Other tasks I completed were helping to set up, manage the sign in table, take pictures, and clean up on the day of the event. I also summarized the online evaluation surveys and helped with any other tasks prior and during the event keeping constant contact with both Dr. Watters and Donna Ojiri.

October 24, 2012 was the big day and after set up, volunteers from the FSHN council had a table in campus center right next to the helping hands food drive table, (managed by sodexo) just outside of Jamba Juice to pass out flyers and direct people to the executive dining room. Presentations then started at 11:00am with Dr. Watters kick starting the event introducing the background of food day, and giving a great presentation on the health and nutritional benefits of consuming fish along with the importance of supporting our local agriculture. Dr. John Kaneko, MS, DVM, program manager for the Hawaii Seafood Council (HSC) then gave a presentation on healthy seafood Hawaii highlighting catfish due to its high omega 3 content. Fred Lau then gave a presentation to educate the audience on his approach of using aquaponics as a sustainable

farming method, along with being organic and food safe certified, to produce Tilapia, Chinese Catfish and fresh produce. Following the brief presentations, Chef Philip Shon gave an exciting chefs demonstration for preparing swai (type of catfish), which was then distributed to the audience by Donna Ojiri and another Sodexo chef. The Audience was then able to mingle, meet the featured speakers, and visit the displays and exhibits including a display from the Public Health Students on food sustainability, Food safety display by Jim Hollyer, healthy seafood display by dietetic student Lee Rosner based on collective research, and a display on SOFT (Student Organic Farms Training) represented by Gabe Sachter-Smith.

Sodexo was gracious enough to cater the event with the delicious Steamed Swai Fish demonstrated by Chef Shon, along with other vendors including Paradise Beverage providing samples of their Kona Red Beverages, Indulge Hawaii providing tropical iced tea, and Armstrong Produce who donated fresh fruits (Bananas, Rombutan, Papaya, etc.) for local produce sampling. To wrap up the event, a raffle prize was drawn and won by a Food Science Human Nutrition student. Overall, UH Food Day was a success and an evaluation of the event was administered through a online survey, by emailing attendees that entered into raffle prize drawing, a link to survey monkey. Approximately 18 people completed the survey and although the compliance with the survey was low, most of the comments and suggestions were positive regarding the presentations, display's and vendors. Those that replied also seemed to be pleased with the food provided at the event. Although there were some suggestions for a bigger room, the majority of attendees were satisfied with the time and location. In planning the event, it was only anticipated that about 80 people would attend according to the RSVP list and therefore we underestimated the number of seats needed, as it was a surprise that over 100 people came out to support the event. This goes to show the hard work in promoting the event early and consistently throughout, seemed to have an impact on encouraging attendance for the event. There was a

variety of suggestions for future events showing great interest in future attendance, some suggestions included information on genetically modified food for sustainability and issues on GMO food labeling, cultural food customs, theme on eggs, nutrition culinary programs, and many more. I personally felt that the event was well planned and that the nutrition component of the event was clearly shown. The only suggestion I would make for improvement no matter what issue discussed related to food, would be to bring in more involvement of other student organizations on campus and to have it at the Campus Center Ballroom as the event seems to be expanding and in need for a bigger venue; as long as the appropriate steps in promotion are taken. Also having guest speakers/exhibits from the Hawaii food bank or other local organizations that deal with food insecurity would be beneficial depending on time frame and theme of the event.

In conclusion, the mission of UH Food day was consistent with the CSPI's mission of engaging participation in the nationwide celebration and movement towards more healthy, affordable, and sustainable food. This was a great experience for me. Not only did I learn about the nutritional values and health benefits that fish provides, I also learned the importance of supporting our local fish farmers to influence a sustainable food supply, becoming more familiar with aquaponics, a very sustainable way of producing both fresh produce and fish in either small or large scale. I also learned about the dedication of those that work on the farm to make it possible. One of the most beneficial learning experiences that I will take away from volunteering for the UH Food Day event is the connections that I have made with the people involved and the skills gained in planning an event which is an attribute to have as a community dietitian. It was rewarding to be a part of promoting positive changes in the food system and I am thankful to have had the opportunity to volunteer with Dr. Watters and everyone else involved. It is evident that there is a need to address the issue of hunger in Hawaii and supporting local

agriculture/aquaculture is one way to move Hawaii towards a future of self-sustainable food resources. Ultimately I learned to make healthy eating choices while helping to build the food movement, bringing locally farmed foods to our tables to ensure the sustainability of our food supply in Hawaii. I truly believe this event will only grow giving the opportunity for other students in the future to get involved with this movement, and make a difference as the future of Hawaii lies in our hands.

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