



AG NOTES

November 2025 Newsletter



SOWING THE SEEDS OF LOCAL AG'S FUTURE

The planned Central O'ahu Agriculture and Food Hub will benefit both farmers and keiki

The state took a major step this month in fulfilling its goals of local food sustainability, as the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) and Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC) broke ground on a Central O'ahu Agriculture and Food Hub in Wahiawā.

This trendsetting ag complex in Whitmore Village will serve as an innovation base in providing manufacturing and industry services at commercial scale – enabling entrepreneurs to export across the globe. The state complex is a partnership between DBEDT, ADC, Hawai'i Department of Education (HIDOE), Department of Law Enforcement, University of Hawai'i (UH) College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience (CTAHR) and the UH Community College System, as well as the Department of Accounting and General Services (DAGS), which is responsible for the infrastructure improvements for the groundbreaking. Goodfellow Bros. is the contractor hired to build and upgrade the roads and infrastructure.

As part of the complex in Whitmore Village, ADC is developing a \$36 million High Pressure Processing (HPP) Facility; DAGS is developing an agricultural warehouse; and the state Department of Law Enforcement is developing a substation. HIDOE is constructing a Central O'ahu Regional Kitchen on the ADC-owned property. The facility will serve as a statewide model for regional hubs that connect local farms to school cafeterias as part of the state's farm-to-school initiative.

The anticipated completion date for the facilities is 2027-2028.

ADC board chair Jayson Watts noted that this facility is a turning point for Hawai'i's agricultural future.

"It gives our farmers and local food producers the infrastructure they've asked for, real tools that strengthen production, expand markets, and keep local food on local tables," Watts noted. "Projects like this only happen when the entire agricultural community works together, and today shows what partnership can accomplish. As chair of the ADC Board, my focus is simple: get shovels in the ground, build systems that work for farmers, and move Hawai'i toward a resilient, self-reliant food economy. This is the foundation for the next generation of agriculture, and we're just getting started."

Remarks at the November 14 ceremony were given by State of Hawai'i First Lady Jaime Kanani Green; Senate Ways and Means Chair Donovan Dela Cruz; DBEDT Deputy Director Dane Wicker; and ADC Executive Director Wendy Gady. The blessing was conducted by Kahu Blaine Kamalani Kia.

First Lady Jaime Kanani Green noted how the Central O'ahu Agriculture and Food Hub and HIDOE kitchen concepts will provide healthy affordable meals to all public school students.

"Hawai'i's keiki and families deserve access to nutritious, locally prepared meals – every day and especially when times are hardest," said First Lady Green. "Fighting childhood hunger is about more than nourishment – it's about building the systems that care for our community before, during and after crises. This is how we fulfill the vision of feeding our keiki: nourishing bodies, empowering communities and building resilience from the ground up."

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“The Food and Product Innovation Network reflects the state’s mission to help farmers and entrepreneurs thrive while diversifying Hawai’i’s economy,” said **DBEDT Deputy Director Dane Wicker**. “Through economic development, we are creating hubs of resiliency that move us closer to food security and a stronger, more self-reliant future. What we’re building in Central O’ahu is not simply a facility — it’s a blueprint for how every island can innovate, grow, and feed Hawai’i for generations.”

“This project honors ADC’s commitment to the people of Hawai’i — our farmers, food makers and small business owners who sustain our communities,” said **ADC Executive Director Wendy Gady**. “Together, we’re cultivating a future where Hawai’i’s food system thrives — guided by community, grounded in culture and built through collaboration.”

State Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means said the groundbreaking honors the vision of the late Jimmy Nakatani, the former ADC executive director “whose leadership helped plant the seeds for this project and the larger Food and Product Innovation Network.”

“He understood that even something as simple as tsukemono — Japanese pickled vegetables — could inspire innovation and revitalize rural towns across the state by empowering local farmers and entrepreneurs,” Dela Cruz said. “From Kona to Kekaha, and Hilo to Hāna, the Food and Product Innovation Network can strengthen Hawai’i’s local food systems and economy for generations to come.”



EMCEE

REP. CORY CHUN
Hawaii State Representative

KEYNOTE

MIKE CURTIN
CEO - DC Central Kitchen

MODERATOR

JAYSON WATTS
Dir. Environmental Health & Safety - Mahi Pono

PANELISTS


FIRST LADY JAIME GREEN
State of Hawaii


RONA FUKUMOTO
President & CEO Lanakila Pacific


ROBIN KUMABE
Executive Director Touch A Heart


GARY MAUNAKEA-FORTH
Mahiai MAO Organic Farms



FEEDING CHANGE AT THE HAWAI’I FOOD AND WINE FESTIVAL: ADC CHAIR MODERATES FEAST SUMMIT PANEL

At the 2025 Hawai’i Food and Wine Festival’s inaugural FEAST Summit, Hawai’i leaders in food, agriculture, sustainability, and education gathered for a powerful conversation on how food systems can transform communities. Among those leading the discussion was **Jayson Watts, Chair of the Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC)**, who served as moderator for the session “Feeding Change: Transforming Food Systems, One Meal at a Time.”

Held on October 31 at the Sheraton Waikiki, the session featured keynote remarks from Mike Curtin, CEO of DC Central Kitchen, followed by a panel of Hawai’i-based innovators working at the intersection of agriculture, social enterprise, keiki nutrition, and community resilience. Panelists included **Rona Fukumoto, President and CEO of Lanakila Pacific, Robin Kumabe, Executive Director of Touch A Heart, Gary Maunakea Forth, Co Founder of MA’O Organic Farms, and First Lady Jaime Green, with State Representative Cory Chun, Chair of the Hawai’i House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems**, serving as session emcee.

Building Food Systems Grounded in Equity, Culture and Community

The keynote by Curtin highlighted the role of food in workforce development and systems transformation, concepts that align strongly with Hawai’i’s agricultural, nonprofit, and educational efforts. The panel expanded on these themes, emphasizing the importance of linking agriculture to youth leadership, kūpuna meals, culinary training, and culturally grounded approaches to feeding Hawai’i.

As moderator, the ADC Chair opened the session by underscoring the shared responsibility of strengthening Hawai’i’s food ecosystem.

“Agriculture, culinary training, and community care are part of the same ecosystem. When we invest in our farmers, nonprofits, and the people who feed Hawai’i every day, we strengthen the foundation of our state’s resilience. This panel showed what happens when equity, innovation, and culture guide our food system.»

First Lady Jaime Green: Keiki Nutrition as Community Resilience

First Lady Jaime Green, who champions food security and education initiatives, emphasized that advancing Hawai’i’s food future requires a coordinated, long term vision:

“Food security is foundational to Hawai’i’s resilience. By strengthening school meal programs, supporting local farmers, and building regional food systems, we ensure our keiki and our state are nourished in ways that honor both culture and community.”

Her remarks highlighted the impact of regional school kitchens and the role of government in elevating local agriculture.

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Rep. Cory Chun: Connecting Policy to Community

As emcee, **Representative Cory Chun, Chair of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems**, grounded the session in the Legislature’s commitment to strengthening Hawai’i’s food economy:

“Our food system is at the heart of Hawai’i’s long-term resilience and economic stability. Partnerships across agriculture, nonprofits, and education are essential to building the future our communities deserve.”

A Festival Built on Collaboration

Denise Yamaguchi, CEO of the Hawai’i Agricultural Foundation and the Hawai’i Food and Wine Festival, reflected on the significance of the inaugural FEAST Summit and the cross-sector leadership showcased throughout the day:

“FEAST was created to bring together the leaders shaping Hawai’i’s future, from farmers and chefs to educators, entrepreneurs, and policymakers. This panel captured exactly what Hawai’i does best: working collectively, grounded in culture, to build systems that nourish our people and sustain our islands for generations.”

A Shared Vision for Hawai’i’s Food Future

Across agriculture, social services, education, and philanthropy, the panelists emphasized that Hawai’i’s future depends on strengthening local food production and ensuring all residents, from keiki to kūpuna, have access to nourishing, culturally connected food.

For ADC, the FEAST Summit underscored the importance of building statewide infrastructure that supports farmers, food entrepreneurs, and institutional buyers. The ADC Chair’s participation highlighted the agency’s expanding commitment to cross-sector collaboration and community-centered agricultural development.

As Hawai’i continues advancing a more resilient, equitable, and self-sustaining food system, the FEAST Summit marked a meaningful step toward that shared vision, one meal, one farm, and one community at a time.



ADC BOARD CONCLUDES NEIGHBOR ISLAND TOUR WITH HAWAI’I ISLAND MEETING

As part of its fact-finding mission in cultivating agricultural opportunities statewide, the Hawai’i Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC) Board of Directors wrapped up its visit to the neighbor islands with a board meeting this month on Hawai’i Island.

The November 20 meeting held at the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawai’i Authority in Kailua-Kona, is part of the agency’s effort to expand agricultural opportunities to Hawai’i Island and statewide by directly engaging with local farmers, educators, and community leaders.

ADC board member and Hawai’i Island representative Nathan Trump during the meeting said he was optimistic that the state agency could expand its ag operations to his home island. “Hopefully we can,” Trump said. “We already have some of the marching orders from our community stakeholders and talking with different people about what’s needed on Hawai’i Island. But I’m hoping that we can take some of these action items from the counties.”

Hawai’i County Moves Forward On Ag Plans

Some of those agricultural plans that Trump alluded to falls under the **Hawai’i County Department of Research and Development**, which is developing its own five-year ag and food security action plan for the island, according to department staffer **Leslie Nugent**.

“For our county planning process, we’ll be having some action planning sessions coming up in January and February, and so that will be a great opportunity if folks on the (ADC) board are interested,” Nugent said. She said those sessions will be followed by regional food summits in the spring of next year and closing out with a final island-wide summit next summer.

Nugent noted that the county department has heavily invested in regional ag-related programs and facilities, including \$710,000 in local farmers, \$500,000 in food security programs and \$2.5 million in construction and upgrades in shared kitchens.



Breadfruit Industry Thriving

Dana Shapiro of the Hawai’i Ulu Cooperative spoke about her organization, which is a farmer-owned business with over 200 members. “This is up from 130 or so, so we’ve actually had a lot of membership growth in the last few years,” Shapiro said, who notes the organization will celebrate its 10th year of existence next year. “Our mission is to revitalize ‘ulu (breadfruit) as an economically viable crop, and a dietary staple in Hawai’i.”

Aside from making ‘ulu more accessible, Shapiro said the ‘ulu co-op also serves the community in other ways. “We’re a member of the Farm to School Network; we’ve been a supplier for the DOE since 2018,” she noted. “The co-op has a Harvest of the Month program

called Ho’opili ‘Ai, in which they offer free farm-to-school sampler boxes for classrooms and cafeterias. They can bring ‘ulu and kalo and ‘uala into the classroom with standards-lined lesson plans, but the students actually get a taste of that crop, which really makes it real.”

Plans are underway to expand the capacity of the ‘ulu processing facility in Kona from half a million pounds to two million pounds when construction is completed.

Hawai’i Island Ag Continues To Grow

Suzanne Shriner of the Synergistic Hawai’i Agriculture Council (SHAC) represents 519 businesses, from growers to processors and shippers, stretching across the state. In an effort to better market Hawai’i commodities to foreign and domestic markets, three statewide agriculture associations founded SHAC. “We are a 501 (c)(6), which is a trade association nonprofit. We also have a 501(c)(3) foundation. We use that to fiscal sponsor ag groups that can’t access nonprofit grants,” Shriner said. “We’re a consortium group of coffee, mac nuts, floriculture, papaya, and now cacao has joined us.”



“We can call into the trade office and help get something cleared for them,” she said. “If someone wants to explore Japan for the first time, we’ll also do that. We’ll help connect them with the federal resources.

Along with directing the Kona coffee industry, Shriner said one of the organization’s goals is to get the state’s industry back in the top 10 in the nation. “Our flowers are just beyond compare around the world, and as Eric Tanouye says, they are food for the soul,” she said. “They’re synonymous with the image of Hawai’i.”

Shriner said that floriculture farms based in cinder soil on Hawai’i Island are usually not suitable for food crops since they don’t have the soil nutrients there. “So it’s a good use of ag land. With orchids, a half an acre could sustain a family business.”

Shriner said along with helping farmers and their operations, more workforce development is needed to inspire and train the next generation of farmers. “We are also starting to see transition of farms to younger owners. We need that desperately,” Shriner said. “I used to be the youngest farmer in the room. Twenty-five years on, I’m still the youngest farmer in the room. So workforce development is something we’re (concentrating on).”

Local Ranchers Need More Support

Hawai’i Cattlemen’s Council managing director Nicole Galase stressed the need for additional support for ranchers statewide, with a majority of them based on Hawai’i Island. “Supporting ranchers means supporting food security. It means supporting land stewardship on a wide scale. And it means supporting preservation of culture through the paniolo,” Galase said.

Galase said land in active management by ranchers have been decreasing every year. “We have limited space, we’re a small island state,” she noted. “Also, ag land is being converted to other uses, or ranches are throwing in the towel because the business is too hard to stay in and make it work.”

Ranchers are also losing their leases,” she said. “‘Ohana that have been grazing land actively are being threatened to be pushed off and lose their leases. But without livestock on the ground, and the paniolo to manage them, it leaves thousands of acres unmanaged and vulnerable to wildfire.”

Galase explained the significant impact of the ranching industry to local food production. One rancher may contribute up to 150,000 pounds of ground beef to our local community. “If you’re doing a 4-ounce serving, that is (the equivalent of) 600,000 meals,” Galase said. “For the school lunches, if it’s 2-ounce servings, (that converts to) 1.2 million school lunches. And so these cow-calf operations are (contributing) to local food production.”

Combating Ag-Related Thefts

Galase and others also touched on ongoing criminal activity such as theft of farm crops/animals and equipment that have been plaguing farmers in recent years. **State Department of Law Enforcement Deputy Director Jared Redulla** addressed the issue with some of the department’s latest efforts.

Redulla said his department is very close to fully staffing their Agriculture Enforcement Unit. “As we grow... the aim is to position ourselves for a quick response in the rural areas of our state,” he said. “We’re using some of the technology that our department has, such as a real-time operations center. Some of our license plate readers, and now drones, to help us more efficiently do law enforcement in the agriculture sphere.”

Back on O’ahu, Redulla said the department plans to use the Whitmore Village site as a hub because it is strategically positioned “to allow us immediate access to the farms and ranches in central O’ahu. It’s more accessible for us to engage the freeways and the highways to get to the west side.”

Next Steps For ADC

As part of its trip to Hawai’i Island, the ADC board and staff also toured a Kona coffee farm. The ADC board will now compile its feedback and findings as part of its neighbor island outreach to gather public input as the agency continues to finalize its Hawai’i Agribusiness Plan, the statewide agricultural strategic plan required under Hawai’i Revised Statutes (HRS) §163D-5.

ADC is directed to prepare and publicly post a Hawai’i Agribusiness Plan that defines and establishes the goals, objectives, policies, and priority guidelines for the state’s agribusiness development strategy. The plan include specific one-year, five-year, and ten-year objectives with measurable outcomes that prioritize local food production, along with annual performance goals, timelines, and budget expectations.





BVSD CULINARY CENTER



ADC VISITS COLORADO FOOD FACILITIES

Members of the state Legislature, ADC board and staff, and ag industry leaders recently visited food facilities in Colorado to get a better understanding of models for similar planned facilities back at home.



The group visited a regional school kitchen and an animal slaughterhouse, both concepts that are in the works by the state on ADC property. The State Department of Education is planning a regional kitchen that will connect local farms to school cafeterias as part of the state's farm-to-school initiative.

ADC board member Jesse Cooke provided an update on the group trip at a recent ADC board meeting. He said the information collected while visiting the Colorado facilities was invaluable for the upcoming planned Hawai'i facilities. If planned and designed appropriately, the Department of Education regional school kitchen in Wahiawā could help lower costs for student meals, while providing another venue for farmers to sell their products.



The Colorado kitchen buys off-grade produce from farmers at a lower price, Cooke noted.

"Basically the kitchen can buy from the farmers (off-grade crops), and the farmers are really grateful because they can't sell those items at retail markets," Cooke said. "By chance, there was a small farmer who pulled up in a regular pickup truck and was dropping off produce."



Every year, the Colorado school kitchen works closely with farmers to establish pricing and volume requirements at the beginning of the year, Cooke said. About 40 percent of the food bought by the Colorado school kitchen was from local farmers.

"The Hawai'i Department of Education mandate is to get to 30 percent" locally grown food in student meals," Cooke said. "They (Colorado) were at 40 percent, so hopefully it's a doable target for us."

SUPPORT OUR LOCAL FARMERS AND BUSINESSES!

Small Business Saturday held this year on Saturday, November 29 is a reminder of the value of shopping locally. Please support our local farmers and food vendors this holiday season, including longtime ADC tenant Helemano Farms' Christmas tree farm in Wahiawā.

Along with selling locally-grown trees, Helemano Farms makes an effort each year to hire holiday staff from the area communities, further contributing to the local economy!



Happy Thanksgiving

ADC wants to wish everyone a safe and Happy Thanksgiving!