



TEAM PROFILE

Sust'āinable Molokai

Based on Molokai, Hawaii, in Maui County, on the traditional land of Indigenous Hawaiians or Aboriginal Hawaiians, also known as the Indigenous Polynesian people of the Hawaiian Islands.



F2FA PROGRAM QUICK FACTS

► F2FA PROGRAM REACH:

Molokai (population: approximately 7,500)

► FUNDING SOURCES:

- USDA Local Food Promotion Program (LFPP)
- Other federal funding
- Private foundations

Sust'āinable Molokai has been in operation since 2010. F2FA programs have been in operation since 2015.

► WEBSITE:

www.sustainablemolokai.org

ABOUT SUST'ĀINABLE MOLOKAI

Sustāinable Molokai's mission is to permanently align the local food supply with the community's needs, increase the total food production on Molokai, and ensure that everyone has access to affordable, local, healthy food. To realize the health and well-being of the entire island community, the organization's core strategy is to support Molokai's agricultural and food-producing community by increasing the production and availability of locally-grown fresh produce and Molokai-made food and farm produce.

With a population of 7,500 and a usable land mass of 260 square miles, Molokai has unique geographic and socioeconomic dynamics that help shape this mission and vision. 84% of its residents belong to socially disadvantaged racial or ethnic backgrounds, and 90% are considered low income. The community's primary food

access has been through the island grocery stores, where approximately 90% of the food is imported.

Sustāinable Molokai was established in 2010 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization to respond to the overriding consensus that those living on the island needed to be the drivers of their own destiny, and work together as



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“There’s a real connection between community and āina (land) here. If the land is healthy, the people are healthy. We sometimes hear from our community that the ‘community is sick.’ These health disparities are connected to the fact that aspects of the community have lost its connection to the land and to producing cultural foods. We are trying to bridge the gap by reconnecting the community to culturally appropriate food, their ancestry, their land - that’s the core of what we are doing through the Farm to Food Assistance programs.”

– JAMIE RONZELLO,
FOOD SOVEREIGNTY PROGRAM DIRECTOR

of Jamie Ronzello, Food Sovereignty Program Director, the organization operates several F2FA programs: Kūpuna Ai, Kaukau4Keiki, Maunaloa Food Pantry, and the Food Hub.

The Kūpuna Ai program distributes locally grown produce to elders in partnership with Molokai Rural Health Community Association. Sustainable Molokais Kaukau4Keiki Program distributes boxes of locally grown produce and other staples to families during school breaks, when food insecurity is highest for families with children on the island. On a monthly basis, Sustainable Molokai participates in Food Bank distributions by sourcing local food and supplying them to the Maui Food Bank, which then donates/distributes to 20+ agencies on Molokai - which includes the Maunaloa Food Pantry that Sustainable Molokai operates.

The Food Hub connects the community to locally grown and produced foods, while operating as an aggregator and local distributor on the island of Molokai. One of the Food Hub’s outlets is a Mobile Market where EBT and DaBux incentives allow SNAP recipients to receive 50% off of fresh produce, edible plant starts, and seeds. The Food Hub is effectively aligning the island’s food supply with the community’s needs, increasing the total food production on Molokai, and ensuring that everyone has access to affordable, local, healthy food. Culturally preferred foods are prioritized, including poi, beef, shrimp, bananas, limes, cucumbers, tomatoes, among other products. “It’s more about food sovereignty than food security,” Jamie reports. “In other words, it’s about empowering our own community to grow their own food and decide where that food goes. That’s where the F2FA program comes in.”

a community to shape the island’s future in alignment with cultural values. In response to the question “what makes a happy, healthy, and sustainable community,” the community identified priority areas and birthed Sustainable Molokai to serve as a central hub with the mission to restore ‘āina momona (thriving people and abundant land). Success for Sustainable Molokai, according to its leadership, is when the organization is no longer needed on the island.

ENDING FOOD INSECURITY THROUGH THE LENS OF FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: COMMUNITY AND FARMERS FIRST

Ending food insecurity through the lens of food sovereignty: Community and Farmers First Farm to Food Assistance, while a new term, is not a new concept or practice for Sustainable Molokai. Under the direction



WHO'S AT THE F2FA TABLE?

Farmers who participate in the program are central to determining price and identifying the technical and support needs they have.

include Business Creation, Business Planning, Financial Tracking, and USDA Grant/Loan Applications Assistance.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR FARMERS

The farm to food assistance activities all fall under Sustainable Molokai's Food Sovereignty Programs, aiming to remove barriers for community members to access local nutritious food and rebuild Molokai's local food system through equitable distribution and, notably, farmer education.

While many people grow food, there are no commercial farmers on the island and a community needs assessment indicated there was a keen interest among small growers in learning how to scale up their production. The island's mostly backyard and subsistence farmers know how to grow food, raise livestock and catch fish, but they don't necessarily have the dollars to invest in farm inputs or infrastructure, or the know-how to turn their farming skills into a business. There are no formal agriculture education programs on the island and farming isn't seen as a career pathway. As Jamie Ronzello said: "We have been putting the pieces of the puzzle together, trying to provide those wrap-around services so that farmers can have access to capital and education." Sustainable Molokai's services for farmers

Supported by the USDA's Beginning Farmer Program and the Administration of Native Americans (ANA), Sustainable Molokai recently launched a program called Mahiai Moa. The project's mission is to increase food production by island residents through poultry farming and feed workshops as well as providing training to their local community slaughterhouse in order to increase the community's access to fresh, nutritious food. Fifteen native and minority farmers form a learning cohort and receive direct technical assistance to grow their farm businesses and contribute to the island community's food security.

Sustainable Molokai's additional programs focus on strengthening food sovereignty, energy resilience, and environmental and natural resource conservation on Molokai. With about 20 employees, they work to advance local efforts that build on existing community assets and address inherent challenges such as health, equity, and educational disparities. The 14-year old non-profit defines sustainability in terms of restoring āina momona, which reflects a covenant between the people and the land, where earth's bounty goes hand in hand with good stewardship. Sustainable Molokai is committed to restoring āina momona to Molokai by uniting traditional practices with responsible, modern-day solutions rooted in sustainability.

IN THEIR WORDS



KEY SUCCESSES

In 2021 Sustainable Molokai procured 10,000 pounds of food produced by 30 local farmers and distributed it to families through the island's food pantries, putting \$75,000 back into the island economy by purchasing from local growers.

F2FA programs are farmer-centric. Farmers are at the decision-making table and are given a fair price for what they have available in season.

Strong relationships with farmers, providing them with technical assistance in addition to purchasing their product.

Strong relationships with community members to ensure their voices guide decisions about procurement of culturally appropriate foods.



KEY CHALLENGES

Producers are small-scale, subsistence backyard growers, and most are growing at too small of a scale to meet all of the community's food needs, requiring occasional supplemental procurement from nearby Maui.

Securing sustainable funding to maintain staff, keep programs running and pay farmers a fair price.



VALUES IN ACTION

Fair pricing for farmers.

Technical assistance for farmers to grow their business.

Centering community voices in determining the food we procure.



LESSONS LEARNED

Community input is essential. A community needs assessment is critical in driving programmatic objectives and direction, not funding opportunities.

It is imperative to have all key stakeholders at the table. F2FA cannot be a siloed effort.

Build sustainability into the overall strategy for F2FA so that the programs can last as long as they're needed.

The Farm to Food Assistance Learning Lab was made possible through a 2021 USDA Local Foods Promotion Program (LFPP) grant, with supplemental support from The Rockefeller Foundation. This profile features one of ten participating teams who served as co-investigators in the Wallace Center's research on the field of Farm to Food Assistance.