

Choose Seeds Not Shops

Nowadays, when you want to cook a meal, you shop for ingredients at the supermarket. During Clarence Ching's early years, he went to his backyard. There were no Costcos or Whole Foods; just him and the earth. Ching's family knew self-reliance. They raised their own livestock, caught fish in the stream, and harvested vegetables from their own gardens. I believe it is time to bring this Hawaii back – a self-sustaining Hawaii, in balance with nature.

In 2007, a study from the Rocky Mountain Institute declared that 85% of the food Hawaii consumes is imported (as cited in Leung & Loke, 2008, p. 2). The State of Hawaii Department of Business Economic Development & Tourism (2012) stated that “replacing just 10% of the food we currently import would amount to approximately \$313 million.”

I propose that community gardens be set up in schools to grow food and share seeds. These gardens will be a place for students to learn the importance of self-sufficiency and hard work. By incorporating the practice of malama aina into the school curriculum, students will have an opportunity to experience what it really means to be sustainable. By using seeds from fruits and vegetables that are certified local organic produce students learn the importance of supporting local farmers.

As their gardens grow, children will learn how easy it is to harvest the seeds of the fruits and vegetables they have grown, take the seeds home to their families, and extend the cycle of sustainability. Even if students live in apartments, they are able to cultivate potted plants such as tomatoes, beans, and green onions near a sunny window. Luckily we live in Hawaii where the sun shines all year round, even into apartment windows.

Of course, community gardens for every school in Hawaii would not be an easy project. But with the help of the Ching Foundation working with local farms to provide seeds to start community gardens, this vision can be a reality.

This project will provide a wealth of experiences for Hawaii's keiki, many of whom have never dug a hole to grow a seed. Not only will students learn the importance of sustainability in Hawaii, they will experience firsthand the profits of their hard work. Students will be able to see a tiny seed grow into something they can put on the dining table and eat for dinner. There is no greater sense of achievement than to see a child's face light up, in awe of what they have been able to accomplish from a little seed. Like T.C. Ching, who came from humble beginnings, Hawaii's children will learn to appreciate hard work, responsibility, and self-sufficiency through a humble seed.

If we don't start to reduce our reliance on food sources from outside Hawaii, we will be susceptible to external events that may disrupt our food supplies. Plus, what better way is there to be certain harmful chemicals and pesticides aren't in our food, than to grow it ourselves?

References

Leung, P. S., & Loke, M. (2008). *Economic impacts of increasing Hawaii's food self-sufficiency*.

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