

## Growing Our Future

Nearly 85% of the food consumed in Hawai'i is imported (Leung & Loke). What does this *really* mean? Does it mean that we're sending large sums of money around the world for food? Does it mean that we may be importing invasive pests from far away? Well, yes, but the worst part is that we're only hurting ourselves and our environment. Unfortunately, the current generation doesn't seem to be interested in farming. They don't see how rewarding and valuable a farming career can be. Additionally, farmers in Hawai'i have trouble growing enough produce to supply large chain supermarkets: they don't want to turn themselves into large-scale industrial farms. Competing with the prices of food from other places is often impossible: non-Hawai'i farms have the advantages of cheaper labor, land, fuel, and electricity. Yet, sustainable farming in Hawai'i has enormous potential. With a year-round growing season and many different climates, we could grow healthier food that would help our people, economy, and environment. So why *haven't* we made the effort? The roadblocks are intimidating, but we must and can do something to aid and encourage the farmers of Hawai'i.

My solution to the problem is to create a private, non-profit agricultural co-operative organization that would work on each of the major islands and educate as well as support potential, future, and current farmers. First, the centers would use an ad campaign, "You(th) Are The Seeds," to get their message out to convince the current generation that farming is a career they should consider. This would also give a public voice to the farming community. Secondly, each center would dedicate space for a farmer's market, so that farmers would have somewhere to sell their goods without the produce quotas of a supermarket. Food quality standards -- like forbidding genetic crop modification -- would be created, encouraging farmers to improve the quality of their goods and creating confidence in buyers by giving local agriculture a better