JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor

DEPT. COMM. NO. 130

SHARON HURD
Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & BIOSECURITY
KA 'OIHANA MAHI'AI A KIA'I MEAOLA
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December 17, 2025

The Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi,
President, and Members of the Senate
Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol, Room 409
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

The Honorable Nadine K. Nakamura,
Speaker, and Members of the
House of Representatives
Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol, Room 431
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Senate President Kouchi, Speaker Nakamura, and Members of the Legislature:

For your information and consideration, I am transmitting a copy of the Report on the Farmer Apprentice Mentoring Program as required by Act 304, SLH 2022.

In accordance with Section 93-16, Hawaii Revised Statutes, I am also informing you that the report may be viewed electronically at https://dab.hawaii.gov/meetings-reports/legislative-reports/.

Sincerely,

Sharon Hurd

Sharon Hurd, Chairperson
Board of Agriculture and Biosecurity

Attachment

Island Fresh

REPORT TO THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
2026 REGULAR SESSION

FARMER APPRENTICE MENTORING PROGRAM

Prepared by:

Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity

Pursuant to Act 304, Session Laws of Hawaii 2022

Requiring the Board of Agriculture and Biosecurity to Report

Annually on the Programs's Operation and Related Performance Measures

December 2025

FARMER APPRENTICE MENTORING PROGRAM
Annual Report to Legislature 2026

Background
In the Thirty-First State Legislature, Regular Session of 2022, Act 304 was passed, amending Chapter 141 of the Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) to include a new section to part I. This amendment mandates the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to establish the Farmer Apprentice Mentoring Program (FAMP) and to provide an annual report to the legislature detailing the program's operation and associated performance measures. Subsequently, the Governor released $270,000 in March 2023, subject to a 10% restriction. In May 2023, an agency-to-agency procurement contract was issued to the Leeward Community College (LCC), with final reporting due in February 2026. The report will outline the following requirements:

1. Farmer Apprentice Enrollment.
2. Listing of Known Qualified Mentorship Provider.
3. Assessment on Ability of Mentorship Providers.
4. Evaluation of Program Results Achieved.

Executive Summary
Since the issuance of the contract, the LCC has successfully submitted four progress reports. This current report covers the period from January 2025 to November 2025 and represents all work on project development completed during that period. The Project Team has fielded surveys and conducted field interviews with various farmers across the state. The review and analysis of the data is nearing completion and will be included in the final report.

Reporting Period: January to May 2025
During this current reporting period, the following activities were undertaken:

- Interviewed an array of Hawai‘i's experienced and aspiring farmers on all major islands.
- Interviewed farmer training providers, farm work-line participants, and facility leadership at three State of Hawai‘i correctional facilities that grow food: Waiawa, Women's, Kūlani.
- Designed, piloted, and launched on-line surveys to solicit recommendations for a farmer apprenticeship program from Hawai‘i's experienced and aspiring farmers.
- Began organizing and analyzing data collected via in-person interviews, farm visits, and on-line surveys.
- Began developing a budget close-out projection and re-budget proposal to allow the contractor to improve the quality of their stated deliverables.

Interview with experienced and aspiring farmers on all major islands

Following their community outreach plan and UH-Manoa's approved (Institutional Research Board) research protocol, the Project Coordinator and Academic Support Specialist began interviews and farm visits with this project's major stakeholders on Maui, Oʻahu, Kauaʻi, Hawaiʻi, and Molokaʻi. The purpose of these activities was to solicit recommendations on the types of beginning farmer training resources, best-practices, strategies, curricula, incentives, and facilities/ locations necessary so that completers would be able to enjoy long-term, profitable, and sustainable careers as Hawaiʻi farmers.

At the end of May, project personnel conducted 25 interviews with 59 individuals averaging 95 minutes each using a "talk-story" methodology. Researchers chose the "talk-story" for their interview format to ensure that the farmers who agreed to participate, who were predominantly Native Hawaiians and Asian American/ Pacific Islanders (AAPI), would be comfortable sharing their knowledge, experiences, and aspirations related to farming in Hawaiʻi because "talking story" is both familiar and culturally congruent (Kahakalau, 2017; Mello et al, 2020).

Nine participants were interviewed as individuals, while 50 were interviewed within small groups (2 - 7 participants each). To accommodate both the farmers' convenience and researchers' desire to observe their food growing operations, the vast majority of interviews took place on farms. Only four interviews were conducted via Zoom.

Researchers used open-ended questions to solicit the participating farmers' viewpoints as follows:

- Motivation for and background in farming.
- Current and near-term staffing needs; including quantities and seasonality of farm workers, desirable skills and qualities, training practices, performance expectations.
- Heavy equipment and agri-technology usage and needs.
- Business structure and financial challenges/ opportunities.
- Interest and/ or ability to train farmer apprentices.
- Recommendations on who should contribute to and/ or pay for new farmer apprentice program.

Interview with farmer training providers, farm worklines participants, and facility leadership at three State of Hawaiʻi correctional facilities that grow food: Waiawa, Women's, and Kūlani

To ensure that this Project might be informed by and responsive to the robust and decades-long farmer training activities being delivered at three State of Hawaiʻi prisons (Waiawa, Women's, and Kūlani), the Project Coordinator contacted wardens at each facility to 1) invite them to participate and 2) request permission to access from their farms, farm managers, and agricultural worklines participants. The wardens from all three facilities expressed interest in participating and supported this project's researchers by

arranging visits to their facilities, introducing us to their staff and inmates, and providing instructions on how to conduct interviews while fully adhering to State laws and Departmental policies.

At the end of the period, the project's researchers conducted participant observations and have completed interviews with 31 inmates within the three State prisons that are providing farmer training. Preliminary data collected from the inmate interviews were rich and relevant to this project, however, they are still being analyzed for themes and key findings. Key findings from these interviews will be presented in the final report.

After interviewing the prisons' farm worklines participants, this project's researchers sought to learn about the specific resources, skills, facilities, staffing, and equipment needed to conduct farmer training and food growing at Hawai'i's prisons. Thus far, interviews were conducted with the Farm Manager at Kūlani (April 20) and with the five volunteer and grant-funded farmer training providers at Women's Community Correctional Facility (May 20). Data from these interviews will inform the project's final deliverables which includes a proposal for the farmer apprentice program's curriculum, learning objectives, and operational budget.

On-line surveys to solicit recommendations for a farmer apprenticeship program from Hawai'i's experienced and aspiring farmers

To fulfill one of this contract's most important activities: "solicit their [agricultural stakeholders] insights about what they would need to both commence and sustain viable careers as Hawai'i farmers," the project's researchers determined that they must 1) design data collection methods involving both in-person interviews and on-line surveys and 2) limit participants to those stakeholders who are most intimately aware of the needs, experiences, and opportunities that Hawai'i farmers face, namely, our experienced and aspiring farmers.

The need for an on-line survey tool arose because project researchers wanted to collect responses from the widest array and largest number of experienced and aspiring Hawai'i farmers. Given the time, expense, and need for rapport associated with conducting in-person interviews, two different on-line surveys were developed to learn the unique factors that arose from both experienced and aspiring farmers.

As a means of validating their survey questions and design, the project researchers conducted a pilot study to solicit potential users' feedback on its user-friendliness, relevance, recommendations for improvement, and most importantly, if they'd encourage their peers–Hawai'i's experienced and aspiring farmers–to take the survey.

After revising the surveys based on user feedback, project researchers sent personalized email invitations to their contact list beginning on January 10, 2025 and gently requested recipients respond by May 1, 2025. At the end of May, the on-line surveys received 97

responses from experienced farmers and 27 from aspiring farmers. Findings from the farmer's surveys will be discussed in detail in the final report.

Organizing and analyzing data collected

Data analysis was structured around a conceptual framework that mapped out the natural inclinations by which experienced and aspiring farmers would engage with a prospective farmer apprenticeship program. By limiting their inquiry to what Hawai'i's experienced and aspiring farmers both need and value, researchers have begun to identify salient curricular elements and training modalities to inform their program's design.

After completing the majority of data collection through in-person interviews, farm visits, and online surveys, project researchers have begun organizing and analyzing the quantitative, qualitative, and demographic data. Interview recordings were transcribed and studied for emergent themes, using a participatory action research approach that prioritizes the voices, motivations, circumstances, and recommendations of the participants themselves. Survey data collected via Qualtrics were compiled into structured reports that revealed patterns across participant responses. Observational notes from farm visits were taken to preserve the situational richness of those experiences.

Developing a budget close-out projection and re-budget proposal to allow the contractor to improve the quality of their stated deliverables

While preparing to fulfill this contract on-schedule and on-budget, the Project Coordinator developed a budget projection for the Principal Investigator based upon the most current (May 22, 2025) Budget Status Report.

While there were significant savings from the unspent Materials and Supplies and minimally spent Fringe Benefit line items, there was need to account for increased personnel and fringe benefit costs (1.0 FTE) arising out of collective bargaining agreement wage adjustments and a "regular hire" personnel recruitment. Additionally, reports from the researchers' site visits led this project's Principal Investigator to want to learn more about farmer training programs on Hawai'i and Kaua'i. The team travelled to see those programs in June and July 2025, respectively.

Reporting Period: June to November 2025

Within the reporting period covered herein, the following activities were undertaken:

- Explored collaborations with qualified subject matter experts.
- Conducted a meta-synthesis study of previous research involving Hawai'i farmers.
- Transcribed and analyzed farmer interviews.

Collaborations with qualified subject matter experts

While conducting community-based research, this Project Team connected with local professionals with considerable knowledge, experience and connections, with the potential to add value to the outcomes of this study. Specifically, the Team recognized that each subject matter expert could contribute valuable and specialized content to our farmer apprentice program design because of the expertise they gained while working, respectively, as a multigenerational farm owner, beginning farmer training provider, and construction industry consultant.

To incorporate existing, local subject matter expertise in direct alignment with this project, the Project's Principal Investigator seek funding to engage with these subject matter experts who would respectively: 1) produce a comprehensive inventory of the "hard" (e.g., technical and operational abilities) and "soft" skills (e.g., interpersonal, leadership, and teamwork abilities) that Hawai'i's profitable farms rely upon to manage and grow their production to align our training curriculum with the expectations that farm managers/ owners have of their new hires; 2) compile a robust set of training tools, e.g., a) training objectives, b) curricula, c) performance and learning assessment tools, and d) training materials, equipment, and texts used at a minimum of three Hawai'i new farmer training programs, one of which must be a State of Hawai'i Correctional Facility; and 3) produce a list of programmatic hallmarks and industry-based commitments that construction trades have used to develop their registered apprenticeship programs as a means of aligning our new apprentice program with well-established ones.

In addition to holding the potential for increasing local stakeholders' support for adopting our Contract's final deliverables, this Project Team anticipates that incorporating the specialized content generated by the proposed subcontractors will increase the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of the new program once implemented.

Meta-synthesis study of previous research involving Hawai'i farmers

The Project Coordinator conducted a qualitative content analysis of producer-focused research and surveys to inform the Team's Farmer Apprentice Mentorship Program design work.

Eligibility criteria for the meta-synthesis sources were reports, surveys, and research that: 1) recruited Hawai'i farmers, ranchers, and food producers as key participants; 2) solicited their needs and recommendations to be able to thrive; and 3) were published within the last 10 years.

Themes within our meta-synthesis sample's (N = 21) data indicated that the needs and recommendations of Hawai'i's farmers identified from across all four counties and six major islands were highly consistent. Using a combination of manual qualitative content

analysis and AI-generated summaries and data analysis, the Project Coordinator synthesized farmers' priorities into three distinct "calls to action" as follows: 1) resolve farmers' long-standing workforce issues through direct supports and incentives; 2) increase farmers' operational capacity and profitability via shared facilities and infrastructures that support farmers' work; 3) enhance farmer education, skill-building, and professional development curricula by incorporating subjects that farmers have identified as critical for their long-term success (e.g., diversified business, securing capital, grant writing, heavy equipment operations and maintenance, and agri-technology).

Transcription and analysis of farmers' interviews

In early fall, the Project Team began analyzing the data they collected via farm visits, farmer interviews, and online surveys for themes that would align their farmer apprentice program design with Hawai'i farmers' realities and goals. Throughout their analysis, the Team aimed to be both meticulous, using tools and methods to increase accuracy and robustness, as well as culturally responsive, privileging the languages, values, and cultural practices of our predominantly Native Hawaiian and Asian American/ Pacific Islander participants.

First, they used *Otter.ai* to convert approximately 40 hours of interviews from farmer interviews and focus groups into 28 transcripts that were used for further analysis and accuracy checks.

Next, motivated by their commitments to indigenous and culturally responsive research methodologies, the Team analyzed data to ensure that the transcripts reflected both accurate usage of Hawaiian language and rich cultural nuances that were observed during the interviews.

Finally, the researchers began systematically grouping their data thematically under three subjects to guide their apprenticeship program design work. Themes that emerged from the data collected were: *1) Farmers' motivations:* Understanding Hawai'i farmers' "why" is critical to design a program that would both effectively attract and successfully train apprentices who wish to become career farmers; *2) Farmers' workforce needs and expectations:* Learning about experienced farmers' expectations stemming from recruiting, onboarding, and retaining new employees will directly contribute to the program's curriculum development and participant eligibility criteria; and *3) Livable wages and incentives for career farmers:* Hawai'i's experienced and aspiring farmers described free, on-farm housing as not just a desirable "fringe benefit," but as a vital component of earning a "livable wage."

- End -