



# The Voice

of the Volcano Community Association



December 2021

## The `Ai Pono Project

(`Ai Pono means "Good Food")

Volcano, Puna, and Ka`u have been hit with one challenge after another: a recession from 2007 to 2009; volcanic cataclysms punctuated by earthquakes, ground subsidence, and toxic gasses; and now the pandemic causing economic insecurity and fear for our health. Individuals and businesses alike are feeling the strain.

Some of the problems causing stress in our community are lack of: food security, sustainable agriculture, job security and job creation, economic sustainability, education and job training, among others. One way to approach finding solutions to these problems is to take a good look around at what our assets are. Identified groups and individuals in the community who have special talents, skills, knowledge, and networks can be brought together in a collaboration where each can use their strengths to make inroads to resolving these problems.

Discovering financing available through the County of Hawai`i and the Hawai`i Community Foundation Puna Strong fund, Volcano based Volcano Friends Feeding Friends (VFFF) partnered with the Food Ingredient and Health Research Institute (FIHRI) and the Volcano Writer's Group (VWG) for a collaborative effort to help heal our community and mitigate hard-

ships. These organizations bring their special talents to the table. VFFF, through its outreach efforts has helped to provide food to those in need since 2009. FIHRI is a 501(c)3 organization devoted entirely to food ingredient safety, education, and research since 2010, and provides education in food nutrition and science-based awareness of contaminants in processed foods. VWG is composed of authors and poets, screenwriters, and aspiring videographers who can chronicle the foundation of VFFF and the progression of the `Ai Pono Project.

In June, the three-partner organizations launched their `Ai Pono (Good Food) Project to educate themselves about the nutritional value of healthy foods and build an awareness of heavy metal (mercury, lead, chromium, cadmium, and arsenic), pesticide, and herbicide contaminants in processed foods. VFFF food handlers became State of Hawai`i Department of Health Certified Food Handlers. Next, an initial group of participants volunteered to be part of the Project to receive fresh healthy food that could be obtained locally to help out our farmers, ranchers, and other local food producers. The participants filled out a survey to establish a base-line of their present diet. This base-line will then be compared with a second survey to determine whether the participants' awareness and dietary habits have improved as a result of their participation in the Project.

The Project features a special nutritious living plant which is given each month to be planted in the participant's home garden. Growing instructions for the featured plant are included to best care for the plant by providing the right soil, nutritional needs of the plant, and optimized growing conditions. Along with other fresh food, the monthly distribution includes recipes, the edible portions of the featured plant, and the other ingredients needed to prepare a full meal. In addition, a detailed educational information sheet of the featured plant's nutritional content and significance is included. The featured plants to date have been kabocha pumpkin, moringa or kalamungai trees, and kalo. Future plants include `uala (Hawaiian sweet potato), alliums (onions), and many more. A video is being produced to document the progress of the efforts provided by the grant, illustrating the challenges and successes.



Note: VCA donated \$250. to buy kabocha sprouts for this project.

Due to the popularity of the Project, further partnerships are being cultivated with local farmers, ranchers,

### *Volcano Community Association (VCA) Mission Statement*

To improve and protect the quality of life in Volcano, County and State of Hawaii, on behalf of all residents of the area. To promote the social and educational advancement, increase recreational opportunities, ensure health, protect natural environment, and develop community spirit. Also, it will undertake any consonant project the community may be moved to assign to it.

However, it will remain nonpartisan and nonsectarian.

## VCA - SPOTLIGHT ON BUSINESS

other food producers, and community businesses. Hopefully, the processes of uniting collaborating partners can be used as a model to provide a pathway to future job training in agriculture, food safety and preparation, technology, business, and video production. VFFF welcomes volunteers who would like to help in healing our community.

The `Ai Pono Project has become so popular that they now have a long waiting list for future projects. If you would like to find out more about VFFF's Project, please email:  
*VolcanoFriendsFF@gmail.com*

*submitted by VCA V.P. Chris Corley*

Joel Halpern of HI4 Farms has a passion for growing ohelo berries. The endemic plant (only found in Hawaii) is in the Vaccinium family and evolved from the huckleberry seeds that may have come with the Canada geese (who evolved into nene). In 2009, Joel began his research on blueberry cultivation, because there was no information on growing ohelo. After years of trials, he has developed a way of propagating ohelo commercially. Joel currently makes ohelo jam, hot sauce, salad dressing and salsa. He believes that there may be an important medicinal use and should be studied. We hope a UHH grad will become interested in writing a grant proposal to determine its potential uses. Maybe you know someone who knows someone who may be interested. Wouldn't it be cool if your cousin or friend found a cure for a disease with our native ohelo?



Catch Joel at the Na'alehu Wednesday Farmers Market. You can also order jam and hot sauce for the holidays. Please contact Joel by emailing *hi4farms@gmail.com*, texting him at 808-443-7012 or on Instagram.

*submitted by Jim Buck*

### Time to join or renew your membership?

#### Membership Form -- Volcano Community Association

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zipcode \_\_\_\_\_

Email (important) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone(s) \_\_\_\_\_ (day) \_\_\_\_\_ (eve) \_\_\_\_\_ (cell) \_\_\_\_\_

*Your information will be kept private and will only be used for VCA official business.*

**VCA is a Group of Volunteers serving the wider Community. We welcome your help! Please check your interests:**

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <sup>th</sup> of July   | <input type="checkbox"/> VCA table at Farmers Market | <input type="checkbox"/> Volcano Long Range Plan |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Committee   | <input type="checkbox"/> Fundraising                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Misc. Grunt Work        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter/Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____             |

Annual dues \$15 individual \$25 family (2 household members) ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Additional donation for printing and mailing of brochures and guidebooks, etc..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Card Expires: \_\_\_\_\_ Total amount received: ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 (office use only)

Please make your check out to the Volcano Community Association, and send with this form to:

Volcano Community Association, P.O. Box 600, Volcano, HI 96785

You can also join or renew at [www.volcanocommunity.org](http://www.volcanocommunity.org)

Mahalo!

The Voice of the Volcano Community Association is published by the VCA Board of Directors: Jim Buck, Chris Corley, Ida Gager, Sher Glass, Aubrey Hawk, Dan Morimoto and Mahi Snell.

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