

# Ka Momona O Ka 'Āina

*The Bounty of the Land*



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## Engaging Students and Supporting Local Food Systems

### HCNP Hydroponic Grant Makes an Impact

Sixteen public schools and three public charter schools participated in the Hydroponic Grant Program sponsored by Hawai'i Child Nutrition Programs (HCNP) during the 2025-2026 school year. An estimated 1,300 students in grades K-12 and 55 teachers were directly involved in the program, which supported the purchase of equipment and supplies for pre-made and custom-built hydroponic systems. This month, participating schools are wrapping up their projects for the year and reporting their results.

The primary goal of this grant was to provide agricultural education opportunities for participating students in order to improve the nutrition and health of Hawai'i's children and build food sustainability in the state.

To achieve long-term student engagement and curricular integration, schools are using their new systems for hands-on learning in science and Career and Technical Education (CTE) in agriculture and culinary arts, as well as Nā Hopena A'o (HĀ) and the 'Āina Aloha Competencies. Other integrated subjects include math, English language arts, and social studies. A participating high school teacher commented that "student engagement has been the highlight of the project. Students have demonstrated a high level of ownership and motivation, showing great aptitude for the technical side of the assembly and system configuration."



Elementary school students eagerly anticipate the setup of their new hydroponic system.



Students harvest fresh lettuce from their school's hydroponic system.

Many participating schools have used their new hydroponic systems to grow basil, cilantro, various types of lettuce, bok choy, tomatoes, and other herbs. Some schools also experimented with growing cucumbers, peppers, zucchini, celery, peas, edible flowers, and other crops. One participating high school teacher explained that, "for most of our students, the concept of growing food is completely foreign. Having the hydroponic towers in the classroom where they could watch the plants grow and be a part of the process was an eye opener and showed them new and creative ways to provide food for their families."

**(See HYDROPONICS, next page)**

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## HYDROPONICS (continued from previous page)

Participating teachers proclaim that their new systems have become a “vital hands-on learning hub” and are “fostering student leadership and a deeper school-wide interest in agricultural innovation.” For a teacher of marine science and chemistry who formerly had little interest in agriculture, this project has “sparked a new passion,” allowing him to “dive head first into agriculture with a focus in aquaculture” as well as “network and meet experts within our community who all want to support my classroom.”

Several participants have reported school-wide impacts, such as the following testimonial: “Beyond the students directly enrolled in the Ag pathway, the installation of these professional-grade hydroponic systems has served as a visible ‘living laboratory’ for the entire school. We have seen an indirect impact on school culture, as students from other disciplines have expressed curiosity and asked questions about the technology, fostering a broader interest in food sovereignty and sustainable tech.”



This “learning lab” buzzes with activity as middle school students assemble, monitor, and collect data from their hydroponic systems.

All participating schools agree that this project has provided meaningful agricultural education opportunities and was interesting, engaging, and impactful for students. All grantee schools are dedicated to continuing to maintain, grow, and integrate their hydroponics projects for years to come!

## Celebrate!

International Year of the  
Woman Farmer 2026

Eat More Fruits and  
Vegetables Day! May 21

Hawai'i Year of Our  
Coastal Kuleana 2026

### Farm and Ranch Recovery Funding Update

Local farms and ranches impacted by the March 2026 Kona Low storms now have streamlined access to recovery resources compiled by [Agriculture Stewardship Hawai'i](#) (ASH) and partners, including a [funding factsheet](#) and [resource guide](#). ASH offers appointments for help registering for Farm Service Agency support and can be reached at 808-622-9026. According to ASH, one of the key challenges that has emerged is the need for increased mental health support among affected producers and communities.

### Grant Opportunities for Schools

Applications are now open for the 2026-2027 school year for the following grants from [Kōkua Hawai'i Foundation!](#)

- [Project Grants](#) of up to \$200 per teacher or \$1,000 per school for environmental/agricultural education initiatives.
- [Field Trip Grants](#) of up to \$1,000 per school for environmental/agricultural field trips.

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