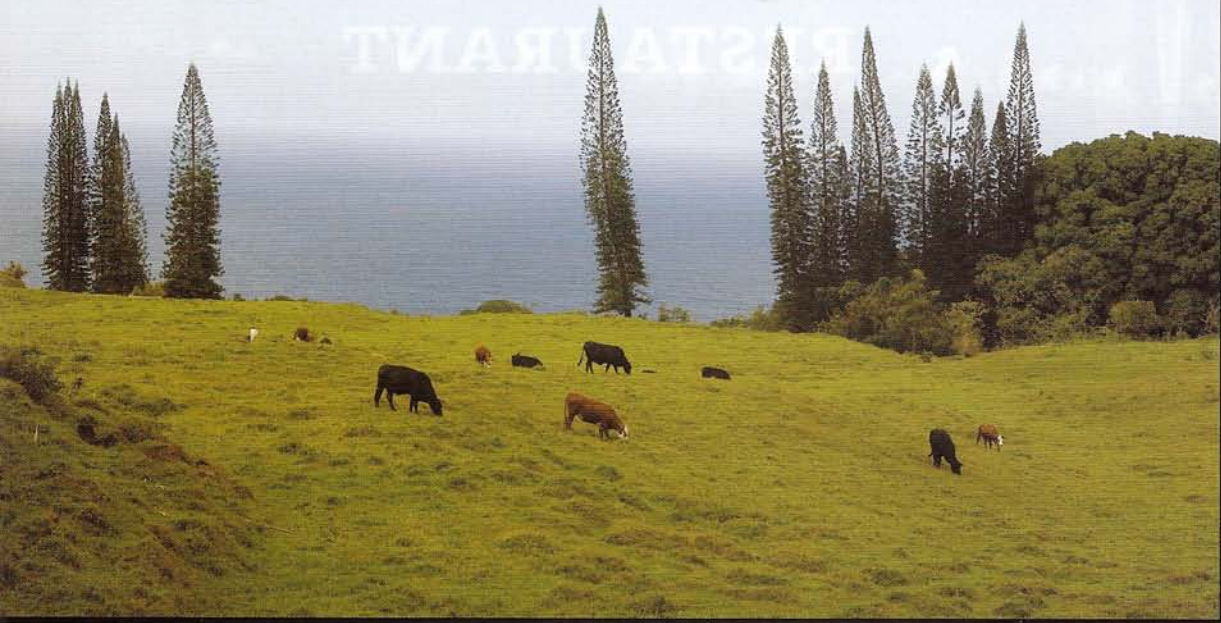


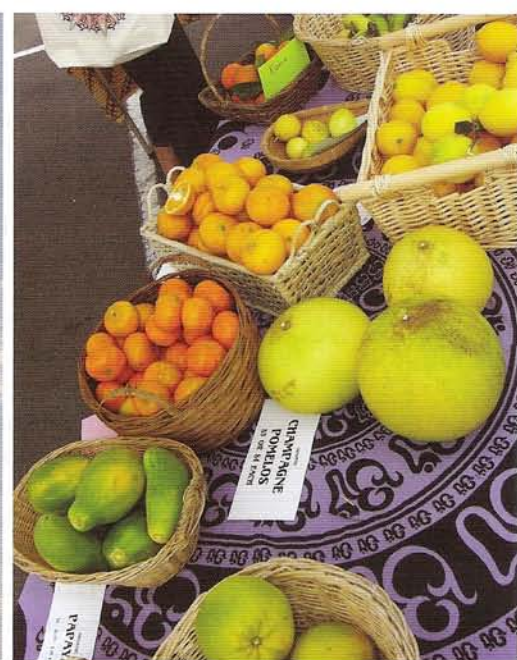
The Art of Eating Locally Grown



What if the ships stop coming? This is the most often cited reason for pursuing food self-sufficiency in Hawai'i. We import the majority of the food we eat and the inputs (fuel, fertilizer, feed) we use to grow food locally. Food supplies and agricultural inputs could be disrupted due to fossil fuel shortages, dock strikes, terrorist attacks at a major port, natural disasters, mad cow disease, avian flu and the West Nile virus. I had researched the issue of Hawai'i's near total dependence upon imported fuel and food, and had been proselytizing food sustainability to anyone who would listen when it occurred to me that I did not know if it was possible for even one person to survive on locally grown foods, let alone the entire island. To discover the answer to this question, I decided to eat only locally grown foods. Although my experiment began with concerns for food security and food self-sufficiency on Hawai'i Island, the same issues



Story by Andrea Dean



exist globally. There are several reasons to advocate eating locally grown foods—obesity and poor health, a lack of food security, supporting local economy and overflowing landfills.

I really came to my food experiment through my thinking about oil. Not olive oil, not the macadamia nut oil that I would come to know so well, but crude oil. Food production in the United States is heavily dependant upon the use of fossil fuel, 17% of all fossil fuel consumed in the U.S. is utilized in food production. In order to learn if I could survive off the land, I ate only 100% Hawai'i Island grown food for three months. This meant grown on Hawai'i Island, not just made on Hawai'i Island. No tofu, the soybeans are imported. No bread, the wheat

is imported. No guava jam, the sugar is imported. I did not even allow myself off-island condiments; that's right, no shoyu (soy sauce). A friend excitedly suggested that I could have malasadas and ice cream, since they were made right here. No and no. The food had to come out of the land or sea right here. Locally grown beef, pork, poultry, fish, fruits and

vegetables would all be acceptable.

According to the Earth Policy Institute, direct farmer-to-consumer marketing, such as farmers' markets, bypass centralized distribution systems, cutting out unnecessary food travel and reducing packing needs while improving local food security. Farmers' markets are expanding in the U.S. and in Hawai'i, but they still represent only .3% of food sales nationally. How much of your food do you grow or buy direct from the farmer—10%, 50%, 80%?

I knew that if I was going to be successful in eating only 100% locally grown foods, I was going to have to be organized. Like most people, I am very busy. I have a job, do volunteer work for a number of organizations, am married, have a 15 year-old son and respond to 40 plus emails a day. I live in Hāwi and wanted to get my food as close to home as possible so that I wouldn't burn extra fossil fuel driving all over the island in search of food. After gathering my favorite fruits and vegetables, I took the time to prepare and process—wash, cut, peel, boil and chop. At times, I felt like this was a burden in my already over-busy life, but I also learned to appreciate this so-called "domestic art". Once I got my routine down, it was easy and the time in the kitchen was



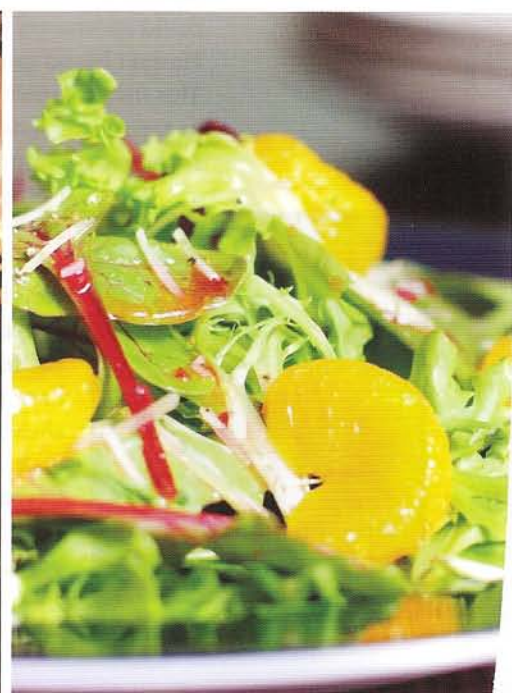
PHOTO COURTESY: (TOP LEFT) ANDREA DEAN; (TOP RIGHT) CHERYL MARTIN

time that I was available to my family. To make cooking easier and to save electricity (a shocking 32% of U.S. food system energy is used in home refrigeration and preparation of food), I would pack my oven full of food to roast. Sweet potatoes tossed in mac nut oil and rosemary. Beets and carrots roasted in freshly squeezed orange juice, honey and ginger. As soon as we got home with our fresh vegetables, my husband and I got into a habit of immediately washing and cutting. By preparing ahead, I had healthy, locally grown food to choose from all week. When I was working at home and hungry for a snack, I would munch on roasted sweet potatoes, take a cup of soup to my desk or have a banana with mac nut butter. Before I was eating locally, I would often snack on chips, crackers, bread and cheese.

We live in a world of convenience and instant gratification. Processed foods make up three-fourths of total world food sales. It is no secret that processed foods greatly contribute to making people overweight and obese, putting them at risk for many other diseases including asthma, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and some forms of cancer. Associated Press reporter Jaymes Song reported in the *Honolulu Star Bulletin* that Hawai'i's 1.3 million residents eat nearly seven million cans of Spam a year and that it's become a staple food and part of island culture. Hawai'i's staple foods used to be

sweet potato, taro and 'ulu (breadfruit) all of which are highly nutritious foods and an integral part of the culture. "The plate lunch typifies what is wrong with most people's diets. Two scoops white rice, macaroni salad and meat, sometimes deep fried, with gravy. The portions are huge and people don't eat a lot of vegetables," said Nutritionist Vivienne Aronowitz. According to MyPyramid.gov, the updated U.S. food guide pyramid, it is recommended that a person on a 2,000 calorie diet need 4.5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day. An average of 33% of the adults in Hawai'i County meet this standard. In addition, 50% of the adult population of Hawai'i County is overweight and obese. About 27% of our children ages 10-17 are also overweight or obese and half of these children and teens are not exercising regularly

One solution to this epidemic is to help children reestablish the connection to their food sources and to make fresh foods available, as is being done at Māla'ai, the culinary garden at Waimea Middle School. "We get free food and we get to come outside and work with our friends in the garden," quipped one of the students. Amanda Rieux, the Program Director, is doing a masterful job of turning children on to the joy and connection of growing their own food. The learning in the garden project crosses over into learning about history, science



and Hawaiian culture. The idea is to create a pleasurable experience around preparing and sharing the food, so the students will be encouraged to make healthy food and life choices.

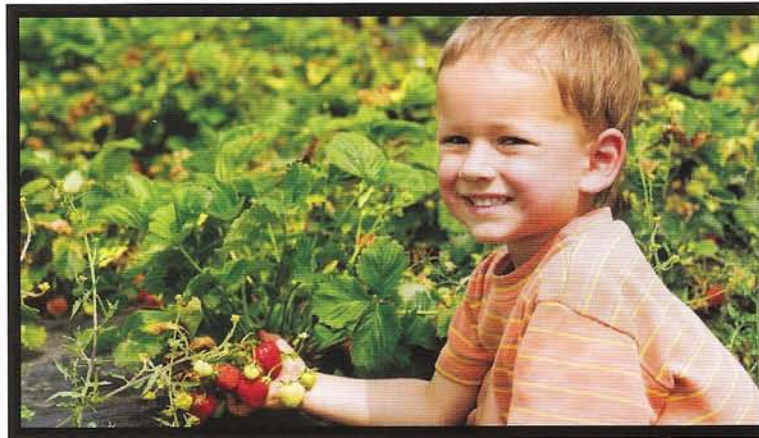
Most of us don't need to be convinced that food is important, but the impacts of our food choices go beyond the obvious. The ability of a community to produce its own food is important for reasons of health, waste reduction, food security, supporting local economy and environmental degradation. Imagine our children eating fresh papaya and banana at lunch instead of canned fruit cocktail in corn syrup, shredded locally grown cabbage on their burritos, a salad bar comprised of all local produce, milk from local dairies and fish from sustainable aquaculture farms. Imagine the men and women in our prisons growing much of what they eat and selling the surplus. Imagine being served a dinner in the hospital of steamed kale, pumpkin soup, taro cakes and grilled tofu.

We ship in tons of unhealthy food and the packaging it comes in. Not only are we importing our health problems, we are also importing our waste problems. When I stand in the front of the food store and look around, my eyeball assessment is that 20% of the floor space is devoted to produce and 80% to boxes, bags, cans and jars of processed food. My eating 100% locally grown foods dramatically reduced the amount of waste I generated, but I was not down to zero. The local milk and eggs came in non-recyclable cartons and I used plastic bags or wrap to keep my veggies fresh in the refrigerator. I know that I can further eliminate waste by shopping with a reusable bag and store some of the prepped veggies in plastic containers. As I grow and harvest more of my own food, I realize I can cut down on my carbon footprint by not only recycling and composting, eliminating much of the waste, but avoiding products with a lot of packaging.

I now know that it is possible to survive and thrive on the food that is grown on Hawai'i Island. Eating exclusively locally grown food required me to differentiate my needs and my wants, but as long as I was willing to alter my food preferences, there was plenty to eat. For the long haul, I plan on maintaining a high percentage (70-80%) of my diet from locally grown foods and adding back whole grains and legumes. I planted sweet potatoes and a second 'ulu (breadfruit) and am planning on growing my own food. The World War II generation knew how to grow food. My grandparents always had a small garden, it would be unthinkable not to, what if there was a shortage? Today we have lost the habit and some of the knowledge to grow our own food. Begin your New

Victory Garden, declaring freedom from dependency upon factory produced and fossil fuel dependant foods. Pam Hirabara of Hirabara Farms says, "Farmers need to start farming for the future and looking not just for the payoff today. It's the story of the nomad who plants a date tree that won't fruit for 80 years, but he plants it for the future generations."

On Hawai'i Island, sustainability is a part of the very life of the place. It's as if we pick up the idea in the feel of the soil, hear it on the wind or taste it in the fish. The global backdrops of increased fuel prices, war and natural disaster have been the catalyst for an incredible amount of renewed energy around the issue of self-sufficiency. So,



instead of sleepwalking through the grocery store to meet our daily needs, we need to be conscious consumers and think of the consequences for tomorrow by how we shop today. We don't have to wait for a disaster or for a shift in government policy in order to start living sustainably. With just a little bit of research and dedication, the consumers can choose to support the companies that are making a positive contribution to our global concerns. We can choose food that is grown locally and we will be supporting local farmers, the local economy and our health.

Farmer, essayist and local economy proponent Wendell Berry said, "The callings and disciplines that I have spoken of as the domestic arts are stationed all along the way from the farm to the prepared dinner, from the forest to the dinner table, from stewardship of the land to the hospitality to friends and strangers. These arts are as demanding and gratifying, as instructive and as pleasing as the so-called 'fine arts'. To learn them is, I believe, the work that is the profoundest calling. Our reward is that they will enrich our lives and make us glad."