

Agriculture

“At Lā'ie, my people exhibit their former dignity and self-respect.”

— *Queen Kapi'olani, commenting in 1881 on the health and welfare of Lā'ie's thriving Native Hawaiian community.*

Diversified and sustainable agriculture has a long history in Lā'ie. More than a century ago, when sugar was literally and figuratively dominating the islands' landscape, Lā'ie Plantation did something unusual: It grew both sugar and kalo in its fields. Cultivating dual crops was rare, if not unheard of, as both plants compete for the same resources, especially water. While sugar was an important export crop at the time, kalo was essential for the community's residents and workers, who remained overwhelmingly Native Hawaiian throughout most of the plantation's history.

When King Kalākaua and Queen Kapi'olani visited Lā'ie in the early 1880s, they were surprised to find a vibrant and healthy Native Hawaiian community. At the time, so many of their people were sick and dying. Having access to the sustaining kalo surely played a part in that vibrancy.

The sugar industry is long gone and agriculture is no longer the region's primary economic driver—it accounts for just four percent of the jobs in Ko'olau Loa—yet the connection between food security, culture and sustainability continues to be important as Lā'ie plans for its future. Today, the city's Ko'olau Loa Sustainable Communities Plan proposed revision sets aside 94.1 percent of the land in Ko'olau Loa for preservation and agriculture.

The Envision Lā'ie process has generated a number of ideas to protect and grow the region's agricultural independence. In various stages of study and implementation, here is a summary:

- **A Multi-tiered Approach** A combination of small commercial farms, small organic farms, community and home gardens, and even fruit-bearing trees lining the community's streets. These smart ag concepts can be designed into new housing in Malaekahana and street beautification plans throughout Lā'ie, putting more local food on community tables—and helping ensure greater food security as we grow what we eat.
- **Institutional Contributions** BYU-Hawaii, the Polynesian Culture Center (PCC) and Lā'ie Elementary School serve thousands of meals a week—a ready-made market for local agriculture. BYU-Hawaii has a spice and herb garden, buys from local farmers, hosts a bi-weekly farmer's market and sells papayas weekly to the community. PCC's two-acre farm produces the bananas the center needs, and sells the surplus to the

community. Lā'ie Elementary School has implemented a school garden, teaching its students the importance of farming. Expanding these initiatives could benefit our local community.

- **Aquaponics and Hydroponics** BYU-Hawaii Food Services is using aquaponics as part of its garden projects. The combination of aquaculture and hydroponics recycles both water and nutrients as part of food production, resulting in a clean and efficient use of resources.
- **Forestry** Hawaii Reserves, Inc. has planted a test plot of tropical hardwoods, including Native Hawaiian koa that is growing well. Expanding this into larger-scale forestry could be a feasible way to enhance open space with native forests, helping protect our watershed and recharge the aquifer. Recently, Envision Lā'ie's Native Forest Restoration service project replanted native koa and sandalwood trees.