

# HAWAI' RETAIL GROCER

SPRING 2021

THE MAGAZINE OF THE HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

## SPRING FOCUS NEW GROWTH

HAWAII'S VACCINATION PARTNERS  
HFIA'S LEGISLATIVE DAY  
MEMBER UPDATES

## STATE OF AGRICULTURE IN HAWAII

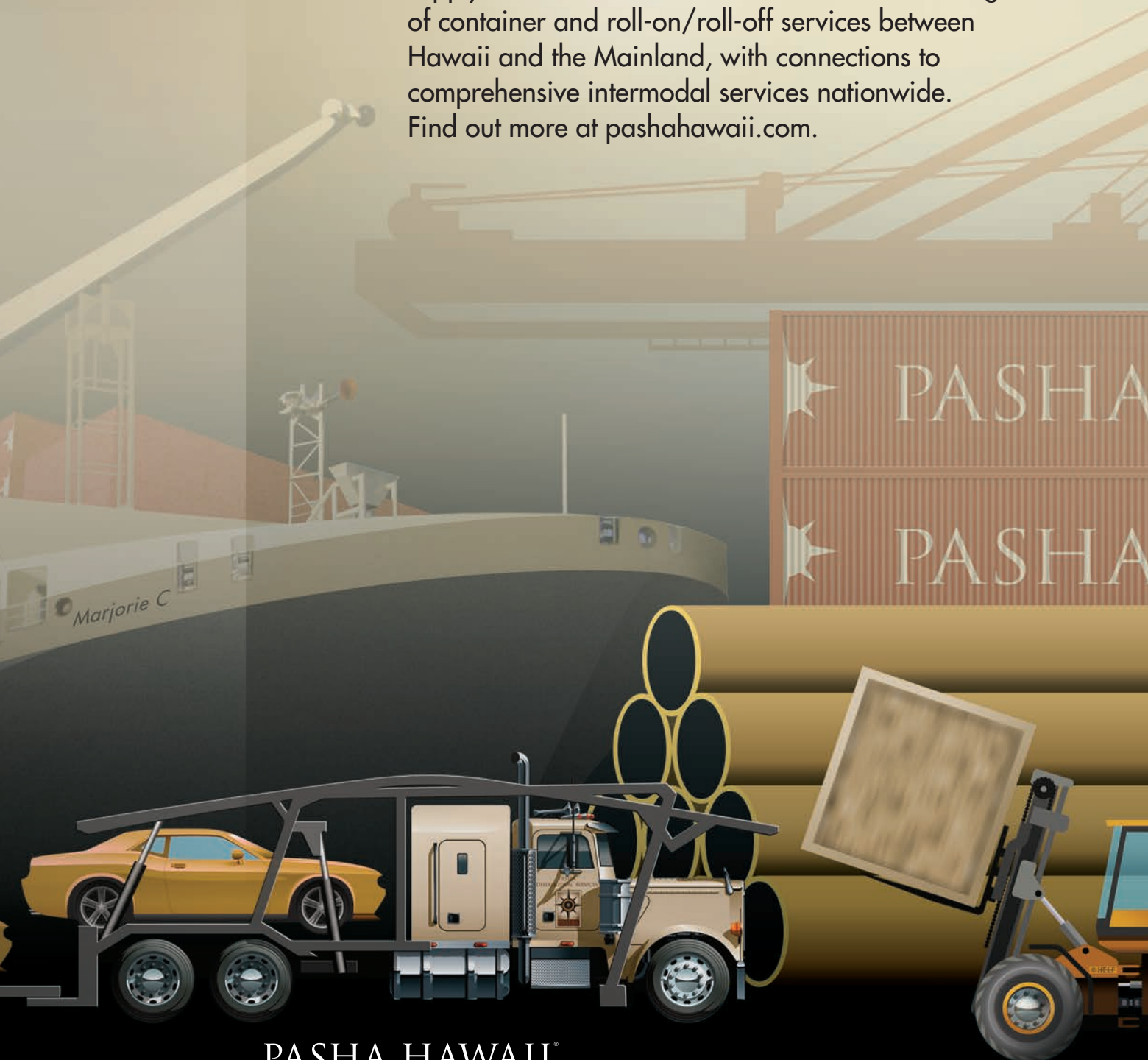
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## Hawai'i RETAIL GROCER

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## CHAIR'S MESSAGE

### Aloha HFIA Team,

We are all excited for a positive and safe year ahead. The New Year did not eliminate the many challenges that our industry and our state still face, but the first quarter of 2021 has brought positive change. As tourism slowly but steadily returns, our local economy continues to adapt and create new opportunities for growth.

Looking back to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic last year, I'm amazed at how fast our industry and our HFIA member businesses reacted and made changes to keep feeding our state while keeping our employees and customers as safe as possible. As we hopefully move into the final phases of the pandemic, these same businesses continue to evolve and make positive changes. Our local businesses have moved beyond adapting and are now creating a new

normal by collaborating with industry leaders and finding ways to thrive.

HFIA member businesses have always been integral parts of their communities. We are not just employers, suppliers and retailers, but also sponsors of sports teams, school supporters, local charity backers, and gathering places. With the drastic reduction in tourism, our businesses have made the connections to their local communities even stronger and helped build a more resilient local economy. There are still a lot of obstacles facing our state and a lot of uncertainty. However, as we move through 2021, I can already see all the progress we've made, and I know that our HFIA team will continue to find ways to grow and improve.

Please continue to be safe, and I look forward to seeing everyone in 2021.



Aloha,  
**Joe Carter**  
VP-GM Coca-Cola Bottling  
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## NGA UPDATE

BY NGA GOVERNMENT  
RELATIONS TEAM

For NGA and independent grocers, 2021 presents a new Congress, a new administration, and a new opportunity to ensure the priorities of the independent supermarket industry are heard by lawmakers on both sides of the aisle.

As Washington, DC welcomed the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress to session, the Biden administration worked to hit the ground running, ushering in a number of executive orders to quickly respond to the COVID-19 economic and public health crisis that has gripped the country for most of 2020.

The Biden administration and Congressional Democrats will need buy-in from Senate Republicans to get anything COVID-19-related across the finish line. Currently, prospects of agreement on an aid package of the breadth and cost that Biden announced in January seem less than plausible. But, there are some items of consensus that may lead both sides to a smaller deal.

Getting to an agreement quickly has to be the priority as the last thing Biden or Democrats want is spending the first year of a new administration hammering out more COVID-19 relief, especially when they have their eyes set on much grander

legislative ambitions.

The House of Representatives passed its most recent COVID relief package in late December 2020. The legislation contained numerous provisions that will positively impact independent grocers, including deductibility of PPP expenses and simplified forgiveness options, extensions of the New Market Tax Credit and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, and funding for vaccine development and distribution to frontline workers. Additionally, key nutrition victories were included, such as increased funding to help independent grocers enroll in the SNAP Online purchasing program, as well as an additional \$75 million to bolster the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program.

Despite these positive provisions, unfortunately the bill falls short of the needed liability protections critical to independent grocers. NGA had requested that Congress protect grocers from unnecessary liability exposure, provided these businesses have taken reasonable steps to comply with guidance from the CDC or other health authorities. The bill also did not include tax relief for frontline essential grocery workers. NGA continues its fight for independent grocer priorities with a new Congress and administration.

In a letter sent to President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, NGA outlined key priority issues for the independent supermarket industry. In addition to liability protections and tax relief

for frontline workers, NGA emphasized that any additional regulations or increased taxes to grocers would negatively impact smaller grocers and ultimately local communities, citing that grocers operate on slim 1 to 2 percent profit margins and there is fierce competition among food retailers.

One notable executive order that Biden signed soon after taking office is aimed at protecting workers from COVID-19 under the Occupational Safety and Health Act. The executive order directs the Secretary of Labor to issue revised guidance to employers on workplace safety during the COVID-19 pandemic and consider emergency temporary standards, such as a mask requirement for the workplace. Employers should expect to see new OSHA guidance as well as new emergency temporary standards by mid-March.

Alongside our members, NGA will continue our work with lawmakers on Capitol Hill and in the White House to gain support, relief or assistance that makes it easier for independent grocers to fulfill our mission under difficult circumstances. As an industry that employs nearly a million workers, most of whom are on the frontline, tirelessly serving the nation during this time of crisis, it's important that your representatives hear from you.

For more information on these issues and how you can make your voice heard in Washington, DC, visit [www.grocerstakeaction.com](http://www.grocerstakeaction.com).

## CITY CARD

BY ALEXIS CHAPMAN

This past winter HFIA was pleased to partner with the Mayor's Office, the City and County of Honolulu, and other stakeholders to launch the City Card Program. In the second week of December about 4,000 Oahu households received their Immediate Response Incentive Mastercards – known as City Cards. Each City Card had a value of \$500 which could be used to buy food and other essential items at grocery stores and

convenience stores on Oahu.

City Cards were distributed to those who were participating in Honolulu's Household Hardship Relief Fund and helped provide immediate relief for urgent needs. Because the City Cards had to be spent within an allotted time, the program also ensured that the funds were infused directly into the local economy at a time when economic stabilization was critical.

As the City Card program website explained "A strong recovery strategy hinges upon helping people in need. This holiday season, Mayor Caldwell and the City and County of Honolulu have a renewed sense of urgency to help Oahu residents who are struggling due to the COVID-19 pandemic." City Cards provided vital access to groceries for many Honolulu families in December. While the program was



originally set to end at the end of 2020, it was extended to the end of January in order to maximize the positive impacts.

As the pandemic continues to cause financial hardship for households around our state, HFIA will look at ways to expand this program, and support other similar programs that provide Hawaii families in need with direct access to funds they can use at Hawaii businesses.





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resilient  
one.**



PHOTO BY SEAN MARRS

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PHOTO: DUSTIN KODA

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

BY LAUREN ZIRBEL

This year marks the first ever virtual legislative session. While HFIA is still busy with ongoing working groups related to COVID response, local food procurement, and vaccination distribution via zoom, we can now also add legislative hearings to our virtual to do list! Many issues have taken on increased urgency in the light of post-pandemic economic hardship for businesses and residents.

## Unemployment Insurance Fund

Under the current rate schedule, payments made by employers into the Unemployment Insurance Fund are set to quadruple. For some businesses their rates will increase more than tenfold. This would of course put tremendous strain on businesses that are already struggling and likely lead to additional businesses

closures. Support of HB1278, HB470, and SB682 which will adjust the rate schedule and prevent precipitous increases.

## Minimum Wage

The majority of the minimum wage increase bills this year seek to increase it to \$17hr in the next few years, these include HB4, HB21, and HB600. SB285 would increase it to \$11 starting January of next year; SB676 would increase it to \$12 as of July next year; SB677 would increase it to \$15 in June of 2023; and HB1201 would make it \$15 in 2024. HFIA opposes an increase. We will continue to work to ensure that if an increase is passed it's kept to a reasonable amount and implemented over a time period that will help minimize negative consequences for Hawaii businesses.

## Local Food Grants and Tax Credits

As a result of the Food and Agricultural COVID Committee, which HFIA participated in, two important food tax credit bills were introduced this year. HB94 Relating to Food Manufacturing creates a food manufacturing tax credit. HB322 Relating to Agriculture creates and Agricultural Import Replacement Task Force and Agricultural Import Replacement Tax Credit to increase agricultural products grown locally. The corresponding Senate Bills are SB496 and SB497. HFIA is in strong support of all these measures.

We are also supporting a range of other measures aimed at incentivizing, promoting and increasing local food production. SB692 and HB1209 will help make sure local meat producers have access to meat processing facilities which we support.

HB1278 and SB512 will remove the \$10 per visit cap for SNAP users participating in the Double Up Food Bucks program. HFIA is a longtime supporter of expanding this program.

## GET Exemptions and Increases

This year several measures exempting groceries from the GET were introduced. HFIA supports these bills, however passage will be difficult given the budget deficit.

Bills increasing taxes on sugar sweetened beverages and alcohol have also been introduced, HFIA will be opposing these measures strongly. Now is not the



time to increase taxes on local businesses already struggling to maintain employment for residents.

## COVID-19

HB726 would mandate mask wearing and call for businesses to refuse service to those who fail to comply. HFIA is asking for changes to ensure that the measure empowers businesses to refuse service to those who are in violation of the law, but that it does not require businesses or their employees to take on law enforcement roles.

## Leave

A range of sick leave and family leave have been introduced, but have not yet been scheduled for hearings. HFIA will be focusing on educating our legislators about the unintended negative consequences of expanding leave in certain ways.

## Bans

Several new plastic bans and new sunscreen ingredient bans have been introduced this year. HFIA continues to oppose unnecessary bans, especially those that increase costs for our local businesses and consumers.

## Canned Water

SB348 would allow for water to be canned in the state. HFIA supported this measure last year but unfortunately it failed when session was disrupted due to COVID. When this bill passes, we look forward to a new type of local beverage manufacturing in Hawaii.

## Waste and Litter

HFIA will be supporting measures aimed at promoting responsible waste management, such as increasing fines for littering, increasing composting capacity in the state, and growing local recycling.

## Liquor

We will continue to oppose direct shipment of liquor.

## Flavored Tobacco Bans

Bans on flavored tobacco came very close to passing in 2020. Realistically it's likely that some form of ban will pass this year. HFIA will be focusing our efforts on making sure that menthol is not included in a ban.

More information on HFIA's Legislative Platform for 2021 is in our Legislative Day article on page 10.

As usual we will be posting Legislative Updates in our Weekly Updates throughout session. If members have questions about any legislation, please reach out to us at [info@HawaiiFood.com](mailto:info@HawaiiFood.com). We encourage all members to respond to Action Alerts and submit testimony on key legislation. We are honored to be the voice of Hawaii's food and beverage industry and when our members testify with us that voice is even stronger.

### CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU DISPOSABLE FOOD WARE ORDINANCE

As required by law the Honolulu Department of Environmental Services (ENV) held administrative hearings this past winter for the Disposable Food Ware Ordinance 19-30 (DFWO). The DFWO, which started as Bill 40 (2019), requires food vendors to only provide fossil fuel-free utensils made of bioplastic, paper, or other renewable materials instead of petroleum plastic utensils, and curtail the use of petroleum plastic takeout bags. It also requires utensils to be provided only on request or positive response from a customer.

HFIA testified at the first administrative hearing explaining the ongoing issues being faced by food retailers and the need for an industry exemption. Because of technical issues with one hearing and required deadlines before implementing a law, and due to the extraordinary circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, in December 2020 the ENV announced that they would conduct an additional 90-day educational grace period for the DFWO. The first phase of the ordinance is currently scheduled to take effect April 1, 2021. This grace period applies to portions of the bill that take effect in January 2021 involving disposable plastic service ware i.e., utensils. Portions of the bill banning plastic food ware i.e., containers, do not take effect until January 2022.

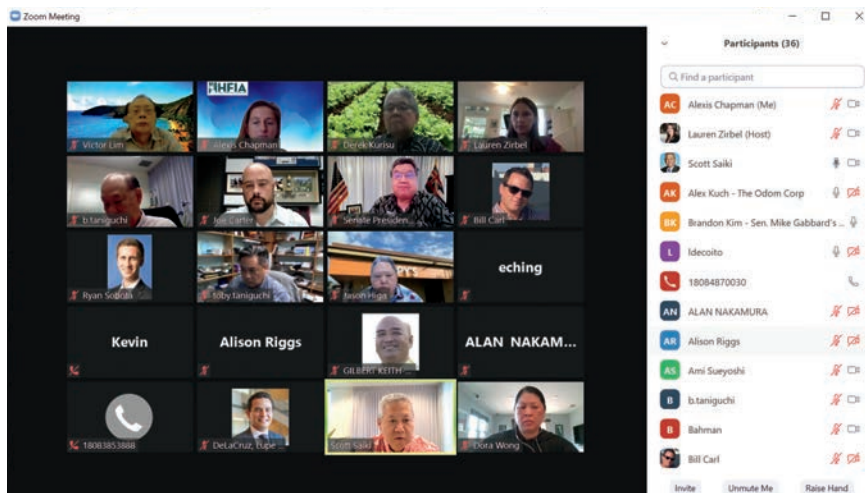
On January 15, ENV held an administrative hearing for the DFWO and heard testimony from the public about the measure and the administrative rules. During this hearing several dozen testifiers gave testimony in favor of the measure, many asked that implementation not be delayed further and that exemptions be granted on a product-by-product basis rather than industry wide. The Hawaii Restaurant Association (HRA) provided testimony reiterating the extreme financial hardships that food retailers are facing at this time and explaining the need for an exemption. When the measure officially takes effect HFIA will be working with our partners from the HRA and the Chamber to apply for an industry exemption.

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## HFIA LEGISLATIVE DAY 2021

**T**his year HFIA had our first ever virtual Legislative Day. Of course we missed getting to see everyone in person and the great refreshments always provided by Coca-Cola and bentos from Zippy's, but we did have a wonderful high turnout for both our First Government Relations Committee (GRC) Meeting of the year, and our Legislative Talk Story.

### GRC Meeting

The GRC approved a platform for 2021 that focuses on proactive support for measures that will have positive impacts for our member businesses, our industry, and Hawaii's economy in general. The GRC also renewed HFIA's commitment to oppose measures such as product bans and extreme wage increases which would have negative impacts, especially during these economically challenging times.

Some of the Platform's key support items include:

- Stabilizing the Unemployment Insurance trust fund to prevent a catastrophically large jump in the cost to businesses,

- Tax credits and other measures to increase manufacturing, buying, and growing local food,

- Increasing the City Card Program,

- Accessing Federal funds for the Made in Hawaii Festival Online Marketplace which had to be launched as a result of COVID-19,

- Reducing the State's regressive tax on groceries and essential items,

- Growing the local meat industry,

- Consistent and permanent CBD and hemp legislation,

- Commercial rent relief,

- Improving the Safe Travels program, and Measures aimed at regrowing Hawaii's economy with strong local foundations.

**The GRC approved a platform for 2021 that focuses on proactive support for measures that will have positive impacts for our member businesses and Hawaii's economy in general.**

### Legislative Talk Story

During the second part of our Legislative Day, the Legislative Talk Story, our Panel included Speaker of the House Scott Saiki; Senate President Ronald Kouchi; Joe Car-

ter, Vice President and General Manager, Coca Cola Bottling of Hawaii, and Chair of HFIA; Charlie Gustafson, VP, Store Operations, Tamura Super Market, and Vice Chair of HFIA; and Jason Higa, FHC Enterprises, Inc, Zippy's Restaurants, CEO. As usual Derek Kurisu of KTA did an excellent job as moderator. Each speaker was given time to touch on their priority topics and then the floor was opened for discussion.

Senate President Kouchi started off the meeting discussing his passion for the Farm to School program. He also talked about the impressive safety measures that many businesses like Zippy's have taken to increase employee and customer safety, and how such businesses should be allowed to continue to operate safely, even if there are spikes caused by others engaging in unsafe activities.

Speaker Saiki agreed with President Kouchi and spoke about how much he enjoys working with HFIA Executive Director Lauren Zirbel. He discussed the Legislature's virtual operations this year and stressed the need for people to be vocal and was clear that this year more than ever the legislature needs to hear directly from businesses.

Joe Carter touched on the possibility of sugar sweetened beverage taxes coming up again this year and the ways in which these taxes negatively impact both businesses and consumers.

Charlie Gustafson talked about the importance of ensuring that grocery employees have access to the COVID-19 vaccine as quickly as possible. This will help ensure the safety of employees and customers, and prevent the shutdown of businesses like Tamura's Super Market, which their communities rely on for food.

Jason Higa gave a very informative presentation on the Unemployment Insurance Fund and the urgent need for the legislature to take action and prevent drastic cost increases to businesses. If increases do occur it would likely cause more local business closures.

After the presentation we had some audience questions and discussion from the legislators. There was positive consensus around the idea that increasing taxes as a knee jerk reaction to the budget shortfall was not necessarily the right answer. There was also agreement and acknowledgement that businesses do need to be very vocal right now about the negative impacts that certain legislation would have on them, and about what they need to continue to survive and drive Hawaii's economy.





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# MEMBER NEWS



## COCA-COLA

**Coca-Cola® with Coffee now available nationwide!**

The wait is over: Coca-Cola® with Coffee officially made its buzzed-about U.S. debut on Jan. 25.

The breakthrough innovation creates the new “refreshment coffee” category with a pioneering proposition that “sips like a Coke and finishes like a coffee” – giving Coca-Cola fans and java lovers alike a refreshing and reinvigorating reset to their daily routine.

Coca-Cola with Coffee and Coca-Cola with Coffee Zero Sugar bring together a great Coca-Cola taste infused with Brazilian coffee. Coca-Cola with Coffee is available nationwide in three signature flavors – Dark Blend, Vanilla and Caramel – and its zero-sugar counterpart comes in Dark Blend and Vanilla. All varieties are shelf-stable and contain 69 mg of caffeine per 12-oz. can. They will be available in the ready-to-drink (RTD) coffee aisle.



## MINIT STOP

**“Everything You Love & Need”**

Minit Stop is launching a new “Everything You Love & Need” campaign for their stores on Maui and the Big Island. The campaign will promote their hot food, cold drinks, and everyday items, as well as the “crispiest fried chicken on the Island.” In addition, Minit Stop’s sister company, Ohana Fuels, is continuing their Fuel Up. Do Good. community campaign to help local organizations. Since the campaign began Ohana Fuels has donated more than \$438,000 to 38 community organizations.



## HAWAIIAN AIRLINES

**Hawaiian Airlines is bringing Hawai‘i closer to three more U.S. mainland cities: Austin, Texas; Ontario, Calif.; and Orlando, Fla.** Travelers will be able to enjoy the carrier’s award-winning hospitality onboard nonstop flights from those airports to Honolulu beginning this year. Hawai‘i’s hometown airline will also expand service at Long Beach (LGB) with daily nonstop flights to Kahului, Maui (OGG), starting March 9.



## PASHA

**New Year Brings New Investments in Hawaii for Pasha Hawaii**

For Pasha Hawaii, 2021 will usher in two new ‘Ohana Class containerships to the Islands, with the introduction of M/V George III and M/V Janet Marie. These vessels proudly mark three generations of service to Hawai‘i’s food industry, and are named after the late parents of George Pasha, IV, Pasha Hawaii’s President and CEO.

From day one in service, M/V George III and M/V Janet Marie will operate fully on natural gas, making both ships the most technologically advanced and environmentally friendly vessels to serve the Hawaii/Mainland trade lane, while surpassing the International Maritime Organization (IMO) 2030 emission standards for ocean vessels.



## FRITO-LAY

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## 7-ELEVEN

**New Commissary & Distribution Facility**

Our commissary partner, Warabeya USA and central distribution partner, Mitsui Bussan Logistics Inc. (MBLI) welcomed the new year at their new Waipahu facility. Today, their operations are more efficient with space to support further expansion of our product assortment. The move helps to continue to fulfill our commitment to you – innovation, quality and convenience – while expanding our service to more neighborhoods throughout the state.



## 65th Neighborhood Store Now Open

On December 18, 2020, we opened our 65th neighborhood store. The new Campbell location is at 693 Komohana Street. The store offers all core products and services along with the newest hot beverage bar. The hot beverage bar features bean to cup brews as well as espresso-based specialty drinks. And with its fifteen dedicated parking stalls, customers can easily go in and out quickly.







## GRALEY

Graley Marketing has introduced two NEW lines to Hawaii this year!

Pioneer Meats: [www.pioneermeats.com](http://www.pioneermeats.com)



2021 will launch the 1st ever PORK "PIG WING" cut. Sizes are, 2oz, 4oz, 8oz & 14oz. They are very meaty and way delicious. Only available from Pioneer Meats. Pioneer Meats' ground bacon patties are unique and versatile. Bring home the bacon!



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## FIVE STAR TRANSPORTATION

We have some exciting news to share!

- 1) New Five Star facility and operations on the island of Hawaii (KOA)
- 2) we have applied for Foreign Trade Zone affiliate status at our new Kapolei fulfillment center (more exciting news to follow)
- 3) new hire Duke Ota to administer our major military and commercial contracts (30 plus year career with Air Force in logistics and current Brigadier General with the HIANC)
- 4) deploying a company wide track & tracing system with real-time updates, GPS enabled and connected statewide to connect all shipments and orders under one platform
- 5) Distribution Division moving to full service and capabilities across the State of Hawaii



## PINT SIZE HAWAII

Judy McDonald tapped to lead local food distributor, Pint Size

Pint Size, the leading frozen and chilled food distributor in Hawaii, has named local industry executive Judy McDonald as its new CEO, succeeding Brian Christensen, who retired after 12 years of service with the company.

McDonald brings nearly three decades of operational and financial management experience to Pint Size. Most recently she was CEO of Palama Holdings, LLC. She joined the company in 2009 as chief financial officer and general manager of H&W Foodservice, its largest division, and subsequently was promoted to president and, in 2015, to CEO. Prior to that, McDonald was a principal with local accounting firm KMH, LLP, and a manager with Arthur Andersen LLP.

## MOCHI FOODS



Mochi Foods is launching Ube Mochi Pancake Mix and Ube Mochi Waffle Mix this Spring!

Ube Mochi Pancakes are the fluffy chewy mochi pancakes you love, with the delicious flavor and distinct color of Ube.

Ube Mochi Waffles have deep pockets of their distinct crispy texture with the vivid color and sweet flavor of ube.

Brighten up your breakfast and brunch with these unique and delicious new products from Mochi Foods!

Both new Ube mixes will be made with Aloha in Hawaii.

Visit [mochifoods.com](http://mochifoods.com) for their full line and more information.



## MAUI FRUIT JEWELS

New Line of Fruit Purees

We have five flavors for our new Hawaii Fruit Puree product line: Lilikoi Passion Fruit with Whole Seeds, Guava, Mango, Pineapple, and Yuzu. All five are made from 100% Hawaii-grown fruit with no additives. Already popular for use in drinks, and really great for making sauces, glazes, and of course in baking and desserts!



## MATSON

Matson took delivery of Matsonia, the second of two new combination container / roll-on, roll-off ("con-ro") ships built for Matson by General Dynamics NASSCO on December 18, 2020. The two are the largest vessels of their kind ever built in the U.S. and join Matson's two new containerships, Daniel K Inouye and Kaimana Hila, also the largest of their kind in the U.S. commercial fleet, in completing the renewal of Matson's Hawaii fleet.

The four new ships are the centerpiece of Matson's nearly \$1 billion investment to modernize its Hawaii service, including more than \$60 million in improvements to its Hawaii hub terminal at Sand Island in conjunction with the State of Hawaii's Harbors Modernization plan.

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PHOTOS BY LAUREN ZIRBEL



# HFIA'S GOLF OUTING

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## Emerald sponsors



## Gold sponsors



## NEW MEMBERS

HFIA is very pleased to welcome two new members to our HFIA Ohana this spring.



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experience and knowledge of the Hawaiian market and deliver a variety of air and ocean services to our customers — to, from or inter-island — to meet any budget and timeframe.

Lynden International delivers service in Hawaii through company operated facilities and knowledgeable, experienced Lynden employees. Trust Lynden International to provide a host of worry-free services, multiple pick-up and delivery options, online web-based tools, and an exceptional level of personalized service our Hawaii customers have come to expect. We look forward to serving you with Aloha spirit.



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# STATE of AGRICULTURE in HAWAII

BY JESSE COOKE AND KEITH DEMELLO



Drone's eye view of Kauai Coffee Farm. PHOTO COURTESY KAUAI COFFEE

Hawaii's agricultural industry has faced the same disruption as the larger economy. Close ties between local farms, the local restaurant industry and the hotel industry means that the extreme losses in these sectors have had heavy impacts on local agriculture too. As these industries start to recover, local agriculture will begin to regrow also, and new insights gained from the disruption could help the state to cultivate a more sustainable and resilient agriculture sector for the future.

Starting in spring 2020, the COVID-19

pandemic forced shutdowns across Hawaii's social and economic landscape. Roughly one year later, more than half of Hawaii restaurants are poised to close permanently according to a recent survey by the University of Hawaii Public Policy Center. Hawaii's hotels are not fairing much better, in December 2020 Hawaii saw the lowest room occupancy of any state in the nation according to global hospitality analysis company STR. They also reported that, on average, island hotel rooms were less than a quarter (23.8%) full during the usually lucrative month. Hotels on all ma-

jor islands were consistently in the mid-20% range, except for Kauai, which was worse at 13.4%.

The most meaningful improvements in these areas are expected to begin this summer. Until then, the ripple effect and ongoing disruption to Hawaii's food distribution network continues to impact the islands' food producers, a critical part of a resilient food system. The State estimates that farmers lost 50-60% of their market because of hotel and restaurant shutdowns.





**Left: Harvesting Dole Pineapples on Oahu**

PHOTO COURTESY DOLE

## Hawaii Agriculture Sales by Sector

Sales by sector (\$s in thousands)

	Annual Sales	Avg. Monthly Sales	Avg. Weekly Sales	Avg. Daily Sales
Vegetables, melons, potatoes, and sweet potatoes	\$85,211	\$7,101	\$1,639	\$234
Fruits, tree nuts, and berries	\$144,161	\$12,013	\$2,772	\$396
Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, and sod	\$100,381	\$8,365	\$1,930	\$276
Livestock, poultry, and their products	\$146,733	\$12,228	\$2,822	\$403
Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, and dry peas	\$83,475	\$6,956	\$1,605	\$229
Other	\$3,842	\$320	\$74	\$11
<b>Total Sales</b>	<b>\$563,803</b>	<b>\$46,984</b>	<b>\$10,842</b>	<b>\$1,549</b>

Source: 2017 Hawaii Census of Agriculture

## The Impacts on Hawaii Farms

MetroGrow Hawaii, an indoor vertical farm in urban Honolulu, felt an immediate impact at the start of the pandemic because its customer base was largely restaurants, according to MetroGrow president Kerry Kakazu. MetroGrow is a first-of-its-kind in Hawaii due to its no-soil and no-sunlight nontraditional growing method for specialty crops like microgreens and shoots. At time of writing this story, their revenue from restaurant sales is still down about 80% from last year.

Daniel Nellis, general manager of Dole Food Company Hawaii, watched as local sales decreased by half as a result of the COVID-related shutdown of tourism and the loss of income and purchasing power of local consumers. “Our operations have had to manage our workforce in ‘pods’ and introduce more COVID-19 safety protocols,” Nellis said. “Our product sales and distribution has shifted to export

more to the U.S. mainland, which means higher shipping costs and lower pricing due to availability of low-cost foreign fruit versus local sales.”

As the pandemic shut down Hawaii’s visitor industry and stay-at-home orders were implemented, Kualoa Ranch saw thousands of customers — visitors and residents — disappear. The ranch focused on its roots as a working ranch and farm to survive. “To make a long story short, more than 60% of our markets dropped in 24 hours,” said Taylor Kellerman, director of Diversified Ag and Land Stewardship.

On Hawaii Island, the Hawaii Ulu Co-operative lost virtually all foodservice customers between March to November 2020, and it even saw some of its customers go out of business. But according to co-op manager Dana Shapiro, the biggest, lasting impact over the past year has resulted from the Hawaii Department of Education delaying purchasing from the

co-op. They were half of its sales before the pandemic.

Kauai Coffee Company also took a hit early on. “Our sales in Hawaii have been directly impacted due to the travel restrictions,” said Dawna Haze, Kauai Coffee Company area business manager. Another significant adjustment was incorporating pandemic safety requirements such as mask wearing and scheduling adjustments to allow for social distancing. “It has been challenging to predict and plan for the appropriate labor at the right time to ensure we can make enough product — but not too much — to support our customers’ evolving needs through this unpredictable year,” Haze explained.

## Farming in Hawaii is a labor of love, not profit, even in good times

Local farms are like any other small business, particularly those tied to a much-diminished restaurant and visitor industry. They struggle to break even or even operate at a loss in the best of times. Before the pandemic, there were about 7,328 farmers across the state, with only 6% having a net income greater than \$50,000. In 2017, more than half of local farmers (57%) operated at a loss, even with the strong and growing visitor industry at the time.

Relative to the U.S. Mainland, Hawaii’s farms are much smaller. The average farm on the Mainland is three times larger than the average Hawaii farm. Along with that size comes economies of scale that local farmers cannot match. And, because large local grocers require significant — and consistent — volume, only 5-10% of local farmers can do regular business with them.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, which facilitate purchases directly from farmers, help but fall far short of making up for those losses. Local restaurants and hotels will likely continue to be the most significant customer base for local farms, and still face an uphill battle to economic stability. It’s estimated that hotels will not reach 2019 business levels for six years. Fortunately, restaurants may recover more quickly and could be back at pre-pandemic levels as soon as 2023 or 2024.

## 2017 Hawaii Farms by Annual Sales

This table shows the number of farms different-sized farms based on annual sales (totaling \$563.8 million across all farms, including non-food sectors like seed corn). Farms by sales size (\$s in thousands)

	Sales		Farms	
Less than \$1,000 (see text)	\$338	0%	1,823	25%
\$1,000 to \$2,499	\$1,370	0%	848	12%
\$2,500 to \$4,999	\$2,832	1%	784	11%
\$5,000 to \$9,999	\$7,402	1%	1,070	15%
\$10,000 to \$19,999	\$12,318	2%	892	12%
\$20,000 to \$24,999	\$6,240	1%	284	4%
\$25,000 to \$39,999	\$16,202	3%	531	7%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	\$7,747	1%	176	2%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	\$26,739	5%	389	5%
\$100,000 to \$249,999	\$36,710	7%	252	3%
\$250,000 to \$499,999	\$40,383	7%	116	2%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	\$47,930	9%	74	1%
\$1,000,000 to \$2,499,999	\$77,978	14%	55	1%
\$2,500,000 to \$4,999,999	\$49,607	9%	15	0%
\$5,000,000 or more	\$230,007	41%	19	0%
<b>Total Sales</b>	<b>\$563,803</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>7,328</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: 2017 Hawaii Census of Agriculture



PHOTO COURTESY DOLE

## What's working?

Across Kauai Coffee Company's orchard, factory, and roast plant operations, employees continue to strive for excellence in their work, even through crisis. Ongoing development to maximize efforts is part of the company culture. With the farm's recent certifications with the Fair Trade and Rainforest Alliance the company has already been fine tuning its values surrounding employee and community welfare, and orchard sanitation.

"Our team has adjusted well to the new protections measures put in place due to the pandemic," Haze said of Kauai Coffee

Company's operations. The coffee company is committed to continue making high-quality product that is delivered fresh to shelves, despite changes to production and distribution staffing. "Our business has started to stabilize in retail stores and our e-commerce segment has really picked up; we are thankful that our diverse customer base has allowed us to continue finding opportunities. I think the strength of our team and our ability to adapt to challenge has really come through in this past year."

MetroGrow, pivoting from a main clientele consisting of many of Honolulu's hottest restaurants, turned to online sales. "We instituted an online store for direct

sales to consumers and changed our product offerings," Kakazu said. The online store had some success and brought more awareness to the operation, but this still doesn't make up for sharply diminish revenue. "I thought that the restaurant market would be more stable than the consumer market. It just emphasized the need for diversification."

At Kualoa Ranch, Kellerman said the shift from commercial markets to 100% direct-to-consumer, has had some positive effects. "We now have a dedicated market and our sales have increased," he explained. Making the change viable has meant renewed efforts at marketing, growing inventory, and partnering with other farms to keep a consistent supply to keep customers coming back week to week. "The consumers are out there; it is just how you get your products to them that is the trick."

At the Hawaii Ulu Co-op, Shapiro leveraged federal funding provided through the CARES Act to strengthen partnerships with community feeding programs to distribute local products. "We had record breaking sales from September to December as a result," she said, a clear statement to the amount of need that persisted in the community.

The co-op similarly developed e-commerce capabilities, with online purchases now generating about 10% of sales. "We would like to grow it further," Shapiro added, explaining that the operation is also working on a strategy to launch into retail stores with a full line of minimum-processed local starches and possibly other specialty crops. The lesson has been "not to put all our eggs in one basket in terms of having any single customer that makes up half of our sales," she said, "or even one customer segment (such as foodservice) that makes up the majority of our sales. We were 95% dependent on food service customers pre-pandemic."

Shapiro shares a passion for the Pacific superfood with her husband, Noa Lincoln, Ph.D. Both are founding members of the co-op. Lincoln engages in holistic agricultural production, research and education as president of the Māla Kalu'ulu Cooperative, and he's thankful for a groundswell of momentum for local food support, from all angles — consumers, producers, distributors and legislators. "It is still smaller than it needs to be, but it is a huge increase from what it was pre-pandemic," Lincoln said. "It helped to remind me what is most important in life and give those things more priority."



## How can retail grocers help?

"More than ever, it is important to support local producers," Nellis said of Dole's perspective. "If farmers fail now, it will be a long time before they can be replaced, and Hawaii will become even less food secure at a time when even shipping is threatened by the pandemic." One way he said retail grocer operations can help is by recognizing the increased cost of production for farmers and producers, so there is less resistance to higher farm pricing.

For Kualoa Ranch, Kellerman said supporting local farmers is the right thing for retail operations to do. "We may never beat outside producers on price, and it is part of (grocers') role, in supporting local, to invest in the marketing initiative getting consumers to understand that buying local is their part in food sustainability and the perpetuation of local ag," he urged.

"Stores like Foodland are doing well in seeking out local produce," said Kakazu at MetroGrow. "We need more of that initiative and even more active marketing of the benefits of local foods and the producers striving to provide quality products."

The message from the Hawaii Ulu Co-op is for local retail grocers to give local producers a chance on the shelves, even considering a smaller markup initially to help them compete until they gain market traction. "It's important to support new producers with good shelf space and through relationship building and sales promotions to ensure customers are aware of the new products," Shapiro said.

"Flexibility, adaptability, and keeping our team motivated have been key to surviving in these challenging times," Haze said of the Kauai Coffee Company team. She would welcome opportunities to collaborate with grocers on demand planning as the future of our economy becomes clearer. "We and our distribution teams are doing our best to anticipate demand shifts in the coming months, but information is still limited."

She recognizes that COVID-19 has taken a toll on everyone in one way or another so some extra compassion and checking

in with the team can go a long way. "This past year has been a great reminder that some things are just out of our control, and

to never take anything for granted. We will get through this, and we look forward to rebuilding together."



COURTESY SENSEI AG

## THE CHALLENGES, AND ADVANTAGES, OF COMING ONLINE DURING A PANDEMIC

Lanai-based Sensei Ag, like many, faced the workforce challenge presented by COVID-19 social distancing rules. As a greenhouse grower and packer, its crops are densely planted, so all functions including harvesting, pruning, and scouting turn into a choreographed exercise. (Sensei Ag grows its produce with hydroponic methods, using 90% less water and producing 10 times more per acre than traditional methods.)

However, Sensei Ag, in a way, had an advantage because its production was just coming online during the pandemic and the operation did its best to plan accordingly. There was not the steep learning curve experienced by companies who were already running and producing before the start of COVID-19. From the start, its plans were designed closely around the recommended government health and safety policies. Sales team interaction with customers and production facilities includes social distancing and COVID-19 prevention protocols. As a result, even with the pandemic, it has seen a growth in retail grocery sales.

For the time being, each area of the farm or house has a team which covers all functions of that area so contact is kept to a minimum. Being food handlers, all of the sanitation policies in place are second nature, and everyone's ability to keep their distance even on breaks and after work has been impressive. In addition to the ever-increasing need to grow locally, Sensei Ag team members learned how to communicate virtually between the farm; functional areas (sales, marketing accounting); and suppliers, vendors and customers. They have adapted to Zoom rather than face-to-face calls, although its team certainly looks forward to the day they are all united in person again.

Still, it was not easy. Lanai is a sociable island community, so keeping distance is not in most residents' or employees' nature. The company emphasized from the beginning the importance of keeping continuity on the farm.

Nonetheless, Sensei Ag's leadership team emphasizes that Hawaii's food security is part of giving back to the community, so the extra efforts to maintain this heightened safety are seen as just doing their part. The pandemic has highlighted that food security is much deeper than storms or shipping delays, and that growing locally is essential to food safety and supply. While extreme weather and delays are temporary disruptions, food security is not.

Ironically, the big challenge may actually be when things get back to a "normal" operation. In anticipation, Sensei Ag's leadership team is starting to cross-train employees between the crops and rotate them in and out of packing operations, gathering in small groups to the degree possible.

The team acknowledges that some retail grocers in Hawaii have been "fantastic" in adjusting to changes deemed necessary in doing business. In fall 2020, Foodland launched a partnership with Sensei Ag, under which Foodland now carries its products in all of 32 locations across the state.

Locally grown produce matters, and Hawaii residents understand better than most that fresh local products are a better value. Sensei Ag's vision for Hawaii, retail grocers included, is that everyone continues to emphasize the importance of local products.



COURTESY KAUAI COFFEE COMPANY



## HAWAII'S VITAL VACCINATION PARTNERS

The successful rollout of Hawaii's COVID-19 vaccination program requires high levels of cooperation between a range of partners all working together towards the same goal. HFIA is proud to be a part of the Working Group on Essential Worker Vaccine Outreach. We're working to help make sure the essential workers at all our member companies who keep the state fed are given access to the vaccine as soon as possible. Part of our work in this group was to distribute the Survey on Allocation Planning for Organizations with Essential Workers. This important survey helped the state to understand how many people would be part of the 1b group, and plan for their vaccinations accordingly. We'd like to thank all the members who responded to this important survey.

Since the very beginning of the pandemic HFIA members have played a vital role

in keeping the state safe and healthy. Of course the vaccine rollout is no different. In the early stages of the vaccination rollout, getting vaccinations to residents and caregivers at small residential homes was a logistically challenging task. Several HFIA members stepped up to make sure that our kapuna and their caregivers in these homes could have access to the vaccine at drive through vaccination events and in-home vaccinations. Foodland Pharmacy, KTA Pharmacy, and Times Pharmacy all partnered with the Department of Health to facilitate the vaccinations for care homes close to them. CVS Pharmacy has played an important role as a trusted testing partner with the state and will also be a key partner in the vaccine distribution process.

As vaccination efforts move into the next phases our members will continue to play a vital role in helping to ensure that their staff receive the vaccine. Our State's essential frontline foodservice employees have done so much work and have taken on many added risks and challenges over the course of the pandemic. Making sure that they get the vaccine will not only ensure they're protected, but will also help



PHOTO COURTESY KTA

**A KTA pharmacist administers a COVID-19 vaccination to a kupuna. The in-home vaccination was given as part of a partnership between the DOH and participating pharmacies across the state.**

protect customers. Across the state different businesses have been using different techniques to help encourage all employees who are eligible to access the vaccine. We can see their success as Hawaii's COVID numbers continue to decline.

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BY LAUREN ZIRBEL

During our Legislative Talk Story this year both Speaker Saiki and Senate President Kouchi discussed the importance of speaking up. As the voice of Hawaii's Food and Beverage Industry, HFIA is all about speaking up. Now more than ever it is evident what a critical role our industry plays not just in feeding our state, but in keeping the population fed, and in driving our economy. When we speak up there are a lot of people who should be listening. By growing our voice we can help ensure that they are hearing us loud and clear.

We have also been growing our voice by participating in industry and government groups and working directly with government agencies on important projects. This winter HFIA worked with the Office of Economic Revitalization and other stakeholders on the City Card Program to provide households impacted by COVID-19 funds to be used at grocery and convenience stores. The program was extended twice to maximize the positive impacts. We're now looking at ways to expand it to provide additional relief to families in need, and help stabilize the local economy. HFIA and several members participated in the Food Stream and Agriculture

Subcommittee which resulted in the creation of a food manufacturers tax credit bill and a local agricultural product tax credit bill. As part of the Working Group on Essential Worker Vaccine Outreach HFIA helped to ensure that essential food industry employees would get the vaccine as soon as possible to help protect them and their customers.

Of course, one of the most important ways that HFIA uses our voice is legislative advocacy. This year we are truly taking Speaker Saiki's and President Kouchi's advice. Both Alexis and myself have registered and are actively lobbying, and we have been calling on members to participate with us as much as possible in the legislative process. We've worked to make submitting and giving testimony as easy and accessible as possible for all members. Hearing directly from us and the individuals and businesses that we represent is a powerful combination and lends a lot of weight to our message. We want to thank all the members who have answered our Action Alerts and taken the time to testify on bills already. We want to encourage everyone to continue to make their voice heard now as we move into a critical portion of the legislative session.

Finally, we've been working to grow our voice by growing our membership. Here



again member participation is the key to success. We encourage all our members to reach out to your extended business networks and help us connect with new members. We want the opportunity to provide the benefits of HFIA membership to as many businesses as possible. As our membership grows we have an ever greater impact and are more effective at getting positive results for all our members.

As we hopefully move toward the end of this pandemic, we are also moving closer toward regrowth. Our industry and our members continue to be so vital to Hawaii. You are feeding our state, employing thousands, helping to manage the crisis, and driving the economy. HFIA is very proud to be the voice of this industry and we look forward to growing that voice with you.

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HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

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## WHY JOIN?

Because, HFIA is....



### Your Liaison Between Government and Industry.

Many of the 2-3K bills proposed by the Hawaii State Legislature each year could significantly affect our industry. Members receive timely legislative updates each week, and we make sure your voice is heard. HFIA has a long track record of successful advocacy on priority policy issues. This is why our members find HFIA so valuable to their company.



### Your Professional Networking Hub

HFIA hosts several low-cost membership events throughout the year. Our quarterly & annual events provide valuable education & resources, while facilitating strong industry connections that help members grow their business. As an added bonus, our events are downright fun. That's why HFIA members share a unique connection and camaraderie that makes this association unlike any other in the state!



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