

HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY MAGAZINE

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CONVENTION 2026

TALKING STORY WITH
HFIA'S NEXT CHAIR

JAYSON WATTS

REMEMBERING
MAILE MIYASHIRO

WINTER GAMES
SOCIAL PHOTOS

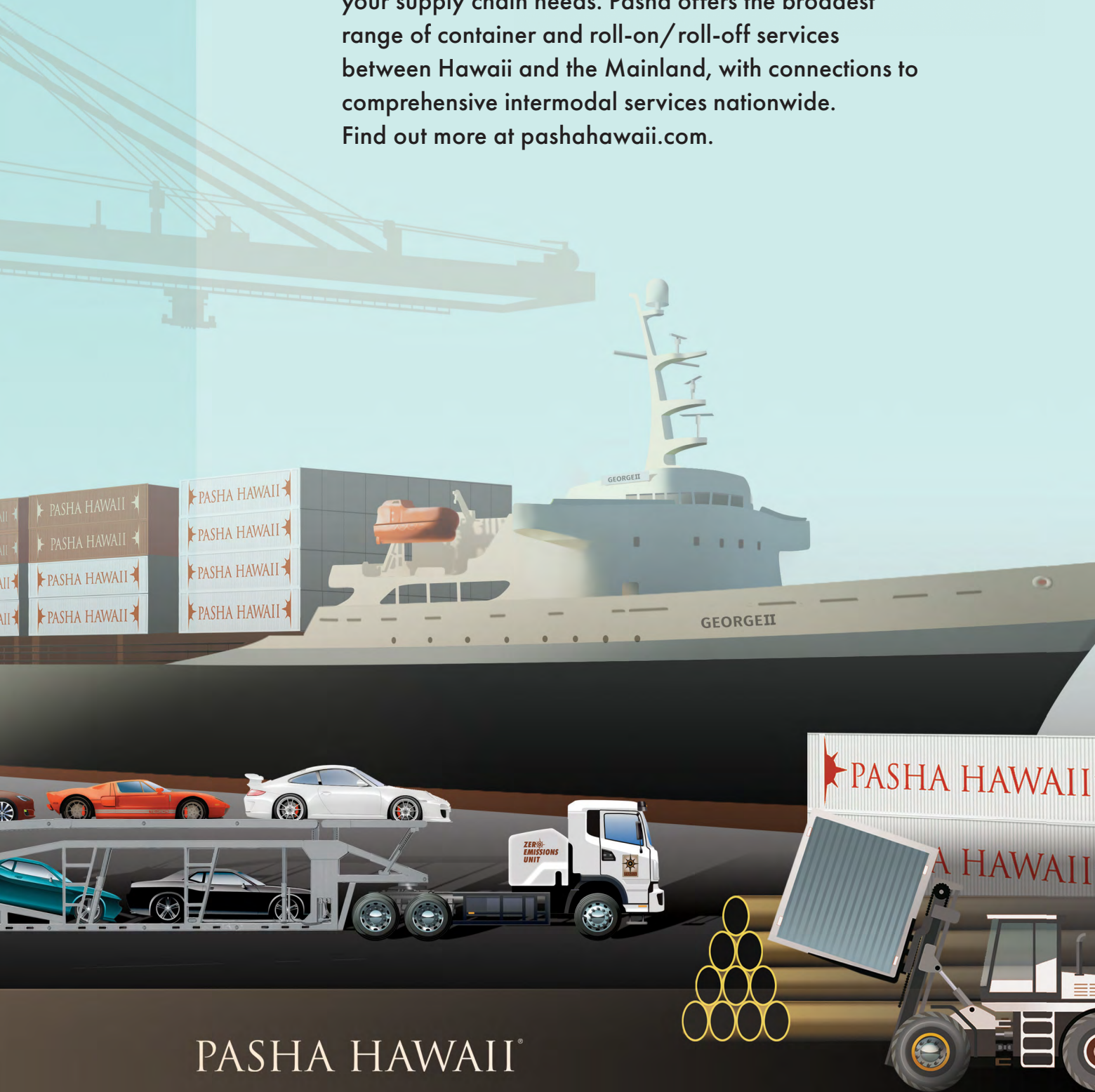
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(Above) Pekuna Hong and her children appreciate the bounty of sustainable foods Hawai'i's farms have to offer.



CHAIR'S MESSAGE

ALOHA HFIA MEMBERS,

It's been a real honor and a pleasure to serve as your Chair this past year. One of the best things about being a part of this industry is the people, and I'm so grateful to have been able to work with so many of you in this role.

I'm excited to be passing the gavel to Jayson Watts, who I know brings so much to the Chairmanship, and I look forward to seeing what the Association will accomplish under his leadership. I also want to thank a few of the people who have made this experience so valuable and helped me lead HFIA during this time.

First and foremost, Mahalo to HFIA's Executive Committee. This is an incredible group of industry leaders who lend their expertise and knowledge to helping the Association achieve our mission and handle the many challenges we face. Jill Tamura, my friend and neighbor from the west side joined the EC as Secretary

Treasurer when I became Chair. I'm so glad to see another local company leader take on this role and I know she'll be a great Chair when her time comes. We also have a local supplier now stepping into the role of Secretary Treasurer, Jacob Noh, of Noh Foods. Thank you, Jacob for stepping up!

I want to thank our entire Board, and our new Board Members who are joining us this year, and of course, our amazing Committees! You make all the positive work of the Association possible. The hard work of our amazing Social Committee makes our Convention possible and I'm so excited to see you all there!

Finally, I have to thank someone who we will all be missing at Convention this year. My predecessor and wonderful friend Maile Miyashiro. Maile's passing has left a hole in our HFIA Ohana and our hearts. I learned a lot from Maile and while we grieve her passing and celebrate her life I'll also try and live up to her great example; laugh more, smile



bigger, and bring some positive energy and positive momentum into everything we do. Mahalo for everything Maile, we miss you.

Mahalo!

Kit Okimoto
HFIA Chairman
CFO, Okimoto Corp.



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ILLUSTRATION BY DUSTIN KODA

BY LAUREN ZIRBEL

The 2026 Legislative Session brought a number of unexpected challenges for Hawai'i's food industry. From interisland shipping and beverage audits to pennies, liquor taxes, additional SNAP waiver proposals that would limit consumer choice, and a wide range of other issues, this session was both active and complex.

PRIORITY SUPPORT BILLS

Two of the biggest challenges facing retailers recently have been the penny shortage — caused by the U.S. Treasury ending penny production with little guidance for businesses — along with the rounding complications that followed, and the costly mandatory beverage deposit audits that created significant operational burdens for retailers.

HFIA worked closely with lawmakers and stakeholders to advance measures address-

ing both issues through the legislative process, and we are pleased to report that both bills were successfully passed this session. SB 3255 authorizes cash transactions to be rounded up or down to the nearest five cents, except for cash transactions that come out to a total of only \$0.01 or \$0.02, which are to be rounded up to \$0.05. The second part of this provision protects retailers from having to round down to zero for transactions that are just one or two cents total, even though it would be hard to find an item for sale for only 1 or 2 cents!

After the penny shortage rapidly intensified following the halt in penny production last year, HFIA worked to help advance this measure and establish a fair, practical, and consistent statewide standard for cash transactions. We are grateful for the many legislators who helped our retailers solve this significant problem!

Another of HFIA's priority bills, SB 3138, also passed! Mahalo to legislators for hearing businesses concerns! SB 3138 limits the independent audit requirement under the State's Deposit Beverage Container Program. The law now reads, "(a) deposit beverage distributors who distribute at least seventy-five million deposit beverage containers in a calendar year ending in an even



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number shall obtain an independent audit for the calendar year after the calendar year ending in an even number.(b) Deposit beverage distributors who distribute at least five million but fewer than seventy-five million deposit beverage containers in a calendar year ending in four or nine shall obtain an independent audit for the calendar year after the calendar year ending in four or nine. (c) Deposit beverage distributors who distribute fewer than five million deposit beverage containers in a calendar year shall be exempt from the requirements of this section.”

This is a major win for Hawai'i businesses and a more balanced, commonsense approach to regulation that reduces unnecessary costs and administrative burdens while still maintaining accountability within the program.

During the federal government shutdown at the end of 2025, there was a very real concern that SNAP benefits would be delayed, putting vulnerable families and Hawai'i's food supply chain at risk. HFIA was extremely grateful to Governor Josh Green, the Legislature, and the Department of Human Services for stepping forward to issue supplemental payments to Hawai'i SNAP recipients during that uncertainty. Hawai'i was one of the few states in the nation able to successfully

implement this type of emergency supplemental SNAP support, representing a major win for HFIA's advocacy efforts and for local families who rely on the program. Securing legislative reimbursement for those emergency funds then became one of HFIA's top priorities this session, and we are pleased that it passed through HB2310. In addition to ensuring DHS is made whole financially, the passage of this measure helps establish a proven framework for responding quickly and effectively should a similar situation arise again in the future.

PRIORITY OPPOSITION AND COMMENTS BILLS

While HFIA is proud of the many positive measures that advanced this session, another important part of our work is helping policymakers understand when proposed legislation could unintentionally increase costs or create new burdens for Hawai'i's food supply chain. Through testimony, meetings, and ongoing collaboration with legislators and stakeholders, HFIA works to ensure the real-world impacts on local businesses and consumers are part of the conversation.

One of the most closely watched measures this year was SB 2694 relating to interisland shipping. HFIA raised concerns that

the bill could allow for automatic shipping rate increases beginning only months after the 25.75% rate increase that took effect in January 2026, despite the PUC previously indicating there would be a two-year pause on additional increases absent further justification. Because shipping costs affect nearly every product in Hawai'i — especially food and household essentials — HFIA expressed concern that additional increases would further raise costs for local families and businesses already struggling with Hawai'i's high cost of living. HFIA also noted concerns raised by the PUC that automatic inflationary mechanisms could reduce incentives to address operational inefficiencies and that inflationary pressures had already been considered during the recent rate case process. SB 2694 passed the legislature despite concerns from HFIA, nearly all neighbor island Chambers of Commerce, and many other concerned groups and individual consumers. We hope to work with legislators and the Governor on better solutions going forward that don't punish consumers and increase the cost of living.

We are proud that nearly all other measures opposed by HFIA in this session did not advance! Proposals to further restrict SNAP choice, ban certain food additives,



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increase liquor taxes, and impose new retailer penalties related to stolen shopping carts were all heard this year but did not pass. These outcomes reflect the importance of thoughtful industry advocacy and strong engagement with policymakers. Hawai'i's food systems are complex, and even well-intentioned proposals can sometimes create unintended consequences for food affordability, consumer choice, and local businesses. Helping legislators understand those impacts — while working collaboratively toward practical solutions — remains one of HFIA's most important roles. **We are deeply grateful to the many legislators who took the time to listen, ask thoughtful questions, and work toward balanced policies that support a strong, sustainable, and resilient food industry in Hawai'i.**

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MEASURES

HFIA supported a range of measures that will be beneficial for local businesses, local food systems, and everyone who relies on them. Below are some of the other measures that passed with HFIA's support.

HB1518 – Allows DHS to establish a pre-release SNAP application process for certain inmates nearing release who were convicted of non-violent offences.

Economic stability and food security can be important factors in successful reintegration, and we're pleased to support any program that will help those who are eligible for SNAP gain access to this great program.

SB2075 - Requires purchasing agencies to apply a five per cent flat rate local preference in evaluating bids or proposals from qualified Hawai'i bidders or offerors who submit a timely preference certification.

We know the value of local companies and locally made products,

and we're happy to support this measure that can help local businesses access State contracts.

SB2360 - Amends the definition of "eligible business activity" for the purposes of the Enterprise Zone Program to include certain retail sales of tangible personal property; processing of certain value-added agricultural products; research development, sale, or production of all types of medical products and medical and health care services; activities of the Hawai'i Food and Product Innovation Network; the provision of certain professional services by health care professionals; aerospace research and development activities; and information technology design and production services.

State Enterprise Zones can provide great benefits to those businesses that qualify, and we're pleased that this measure will allow more businesses to take advantage of those benefits.

HB1334 - Establishes an Axis Deer Meat Donation Pilot Program to exempt the donation of axis deer meat to a charitable, religious, or nonprofit organization for the purpose of feeding needy individuals from certain laws.

Axis deer can be an affordable local protein source, and this measure can facilitate donations to help address food insecurity.

HB1707 - Establishes a Local Agriculture Transportation Cost Reimbursement Pilot Program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to reimburse eligible ranchers and farmers a portion of their transportation costs.

The cost of interisland shipping can be a major challenge for local food production, and we're pleased to support this measure aimed at addressing that.

SB3302 - Requires the Department of Health to adopt rules to authorize and regulate farm kitchens on the same basis as home kitchens producing homemade food products.

Producing foods directly on the farm with local produce is a great way to create value added local products, and we're happy to support legislation to enable that process.

We were also pleased to support appointments of HFIA Members to several important positions where they have graciously volunteered to help put their expertise to work for the state. HFIA's incoming Chair Jayson Watts of Mahi Pono will serve another term on the Board of Directors of the Agribusiness Development Corporation. Keith DeMello of Ulupono will be serving on the Hawai'i Workforce Development Council, and Central Pacific Bank's Keith Amemiya will be on the Board of Regents of the University of Hawai'i. We want to thank these members for their dedication and service in these important roles.

Finally, HFIA supported several resolutions that successfully passed and which we believe will help facilitate positive change. HR60 requests the Department of Business and Economic Development and Tourism to conduct a study on the effect of State and County Tax structures and programs on the long-term economic growth of the State of Hawaii. HR109 urges the Governor to assess food insecurity and implement a statewide food security response plan. HR136 requests that the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity collaborate with State and County Agencies and community-based organizations to develop a comprehensive statewide food security strategy.

HFIA is incredibly proud of what we accomplished together during the 2026 Legislative Session. The successes achieved this year reflect the strength, expertise, and engagement of HFIA's membership and the importance of having a strong, united voice for Hawai'i's food industry at the State Capitol.

Your HFIA membership strengthens Hawai'i's food supply chain and promotes practical, balanced policies that keep food accessible and affordable for our communities. Your collective voice truly makes a difference. Mahalo to all of our members who submitted testimony, shared their perspectives, and helped strengthen our industry during this session. ❄️

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A FARM BILL THAT WORKS FOR MAIN STREET

BY GREG FERRARA,
PRESIDENT AND CEO, NATIONAL GROCERS ASSOCIATION

For independent grocers from the North Shore to Hilo, and from rural Wisconsin to inner-city Atlanta, the Farm Bill is one of the most consequential pieces of legislation Congress takes up. It governs the nutrition programs millions of Americans rely on, sets the rules of the road for SNAP redemption, and shapes the regulatory environment in which community grocers compete. So when the U.S. House of Representatives passed its version of the Farm Bill, the National Grocers Association (NGA) took notice, and for good reason.

The House bill includes a slate of provisions NGA has championed for years on behalf of the independent supermarket industry. Chief among them is a permanent ban on transaction fees for SNAP EBT purchases. For Hawaii grocers and other independents nationwide who operate on razor-thin margins, this is not an abstract policy victory. New fees on EBT transactions would have meant real costs absorbed by the very stores that serve as the backbone of food access in remote, rural, and low-income communities — and, in many neighborhoods, are the only full-service grocery store for miles.

“Independent grocers operate on razor-thin margins, and trans-

“Independent grocers are proud to serve as trusted SNAP partners on Main Street, often as the only full-service food store in their communities,” Johnson added. “By advancing the Farm Bill, Congress has chosen a path that strengthens the program, expands access to nutritious options, and respects the pilots still being conducted in the states.”

action fees on SNAP purchases have threatened to impose detrimental costs on the very stores that serve as the backbone of food access in rural and low-income communities,” said Stephanie Johnson, NGA’s senior vice president of government relations. “We are grateful for the inclusion of the permanent ban on EBT fees and remain committed to working with the Senate to ensure this provision is included in the final bill.”

The House also rejected proposals that would have imposed new federal restrictions on certain foods purchasable with SNAP benefits before the current state-led waiver pilot programs could be implemented and evaluated. NGA shares the goal of improving nutrition outcomes, but several states are already actively testing restriction policies under USDA-approved waivers. Letting those pilots run their course is essential to crafting future nutrition policies that are workable for retailers, fair to customers, and grounded in evidence rather than assumption.

In place of untested restrictions, the bill takes a constructive path forward by strengthening the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP). The legislation expands incentives to cover frozen fruits and vegetables, a meaningful change for grocers serving communities where fresh produce can be cost-prohibitive or seasonally limited and reduces the required match in high-poverty areas, making it easier for retailers in underserved markets to participate. It is a positive, market-based approach that puts purchasing

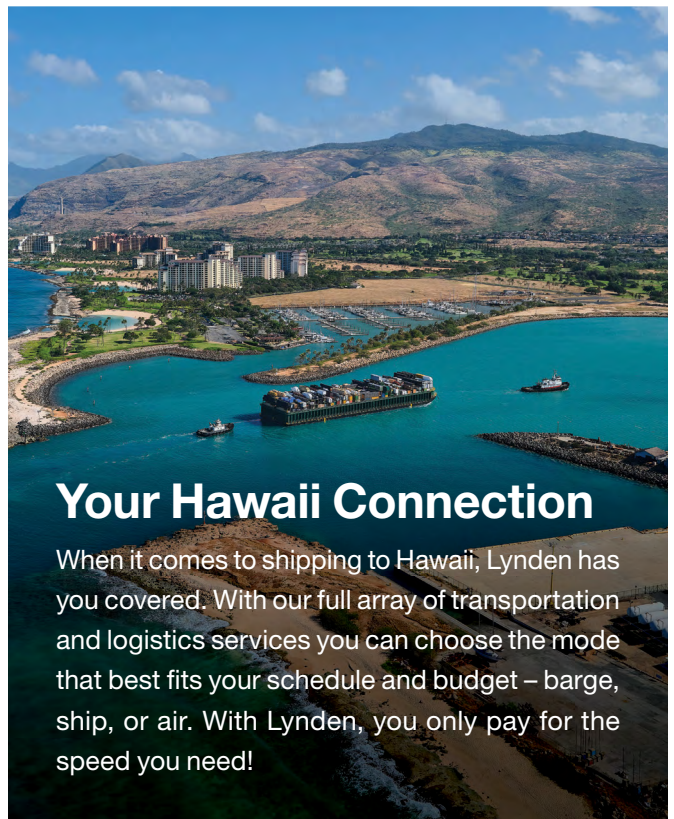
power in customers’ hands and gives grocers a constructive role in improving nutrition outcomes.

Equally important, the bill makes SNAP online purchasing permanent nationwide. What began as a pandemic-era pilot has become a lifeline for working families, seniors who cannot easily get to the store, and individuals with disabilities. By giving the program permanent footing, Congress is giving retailers the certainty they need to keep investing in the technology, logistics, and training that online SNAP requires.

As the Farm Bill now moves to the U.S. Senate, NGA’s work is far from finished. We are optimistic that the final legislation will go further still, particularly on long-overdue EBT modernization. That means chip-enabled EBT cards and stronger tools to fight EBT skimming, the fraud scheme that has cost beneficiaries and retailers alike across the country. These reforms would strengthen the program by enhancing accountability and supporting the critical work local grocers do every day to keep their communities fed. NGA is engaging Senate leaders to keep these reforms front and center.

“Independent grocers are proud to serve as trusted SNAP partners on Main Street, often as the only full-service food store in their communities,” Johnson added. “By advancing the Farm Bill, Congress has chosen a path that strengthens the program, expands access to nutritious options, and respects the pilots still being conducted in the states.”

For HFIA members, the message from Washington is one of cautious optimism. The House has done its part. Now NGA is working with state grocers associations, in Hawaii and across the country, to see this bill across the finish line in 2026. Hawaii’s independent grocers, like our members nationwide, deserve a Farm Bill that recognizes the indispensable role they play in their communities. We are committed to delivering it. ❖



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FARMERS AND RANCHERS SEEK RELIEF POST KONA LOWS DISASTER

BY MARY VORSINO, PH.D.

Months after back-to-back Kona low storms battered the state with catastrophic flooding and intense winds, the scope of the impacts on Hawaii's farms is still coming into focus, experts say.

Some 2,000 farms from Waiialua to Wailuku reported storm damage, including destroyed harvests, washed out infrastructure, and farm vehicles, tractors and other equipment swept away in floodwaters. But the price tag for the damage, at nearly \$50 million already, is expected to continue to rise as farmers and ranchers take on new or unexpected costs.

"For a \$600 million industry, \$50 million in damage is quite a bit," says Brian Miyamoto, Hawai'i Farm Bureau executive director. "That's a significant amount of the farms in the state of Hawai'i that had some kind of impact. Some of them, their entire operations were wiped out."

And given that most island farms are small businesses, the risk of failure is a real threat.

"They're resilient, but resiliency doesn't replace resources," Miyamoto says. "We know many out there are struggling, and we're doing our best to determine who may be at risk of falling through the gap. We're trying to do all we can so our farmers can get back to production."

At the same time, advocates and policymakers alike are hoping the storms, which dumped more than 60 inches of rain in some areas and unleashed a "rain bomb" over O'ahu, serve as a wake-up call about the importance of preparing for all types of threats to Hawai'i's farming sector.

Miyamoto adds the storms also make a strong case for a state rainy-day fund to provide farmers with help after all types of disasters, from hurricanes to wildfires to localized flooding. "The question is: How can we prepare for what we believe will continue to happen?" he says.

The fallout from the Kona lows comes as the state is working to bolster agricultural output to reduce the reliance on imports. Protecting against mid- and long-term impacts means acting fast to help farmers and ranchers recover and get back to meeting their

output goals, says Hunter Heavilin, advocacy director for Hawaii Farmers Union United and a food systems planner.

And even with help, he adds, "the likelihood is there will be some farm operations that don't come back online and as a result we're going to see this ripple out throughout the food system."

Heavilin says some "didn't just lose what they already harvested. They lost what was in the ground, lost the capacity to produce again"—a total wipeout that can prove impossible to bounce back from. Most Hawai'i farms are small businesses and don't carry crop insurance.

That, says Heavilin, is why a stronger safety net for farmers is critical to preserve the fragile expansion of the agricultural sector and make more gains. "The good news is that these storms have forged stronger partnerships between the agricultural membership organizations," he says.

Heavilin and Miyamoto are also optimistic about a growing government role in the discussion, including at the county level. They say emergency planners are acknowledging the importance of immediate farm response and recovery guidelines for a broader list of disasters, including floods.

In the wake of the Kona lows, the state Agriculture Department did roll out an Emergency Farmer Relief Program, with one-time grants of up to \$1,500 available for immediate needs. In announcing the funds, Gov. Josh Green called farmers a "crucial lifeline for our food security and sustainability efforts" and noted island farmers could also seek low-interest loans.

Amanda Shaw, statewide food systems coordinator at Agriculture Stewardship Hawai'i, says while emergency assistance is much needed, strengthening the state's food production system (and supporting its producers) will require better planning and coordination before storms hit.

She says Hawai'i should stand up a statewide disaster coordination framework for the agricultural sector. Shaw also suggests providing funding for farms to prepare for climate change. "We want to improve our collective preparedness by continually caring for our



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HAWAII FARM BUREAU

lands, waters and the people that steward them while building effective infrastructure to support them when disaster strikes," she says, adding better coordination puts "shared values" that support local farming and ranching production at the centerpiece of any planning conversation. "We can learn from previous crises by continually caring for and resourcing our lands, waters and people and creating spaces ... to communicate and support one other better," Shaw says.

Heavilin notes the wildfires that destroyed Lahaina, while not a statewide disaster, did underscore the importance of gathering information from farmers early about damage. In the wake of the Kona lows, farming groups quickly gathered surveys on storm impacts. And those figures were further revised with state data collected for the emergency farm grants.

In early May, Miyamoto went to a weekend farmers market to offer his support to producers—and conduct a pulse-check of sorts. What he saw was a mixed bag. There were fewer fresh offerings and less variety, but farmers were upbeat and so were their customers.

"Farmers lost what was in the ground and some weren't able to re-plant right away. So, the short-term impact is being felt and we're seeing a reduction," Miyamoto says. As for the long-term picture, he says, that will depend on the support that farmers get to bounce back.

"It will come down to the counties, state and federal agencies, and private sector and how successful we are in ensuring those who were impacted can recover and can get back to the level that they were," Miyamoto says, adding the support can't stop there. If the Kona lows taught us anything, he says, it's that the agriculture sector needs to prepare for the next disaster.

"Farmers and ranchers, they're usually the first to show up when people are in need," he says. "The one thing farmers rarely do is ask for help. We're here to ask for help for them." ❁

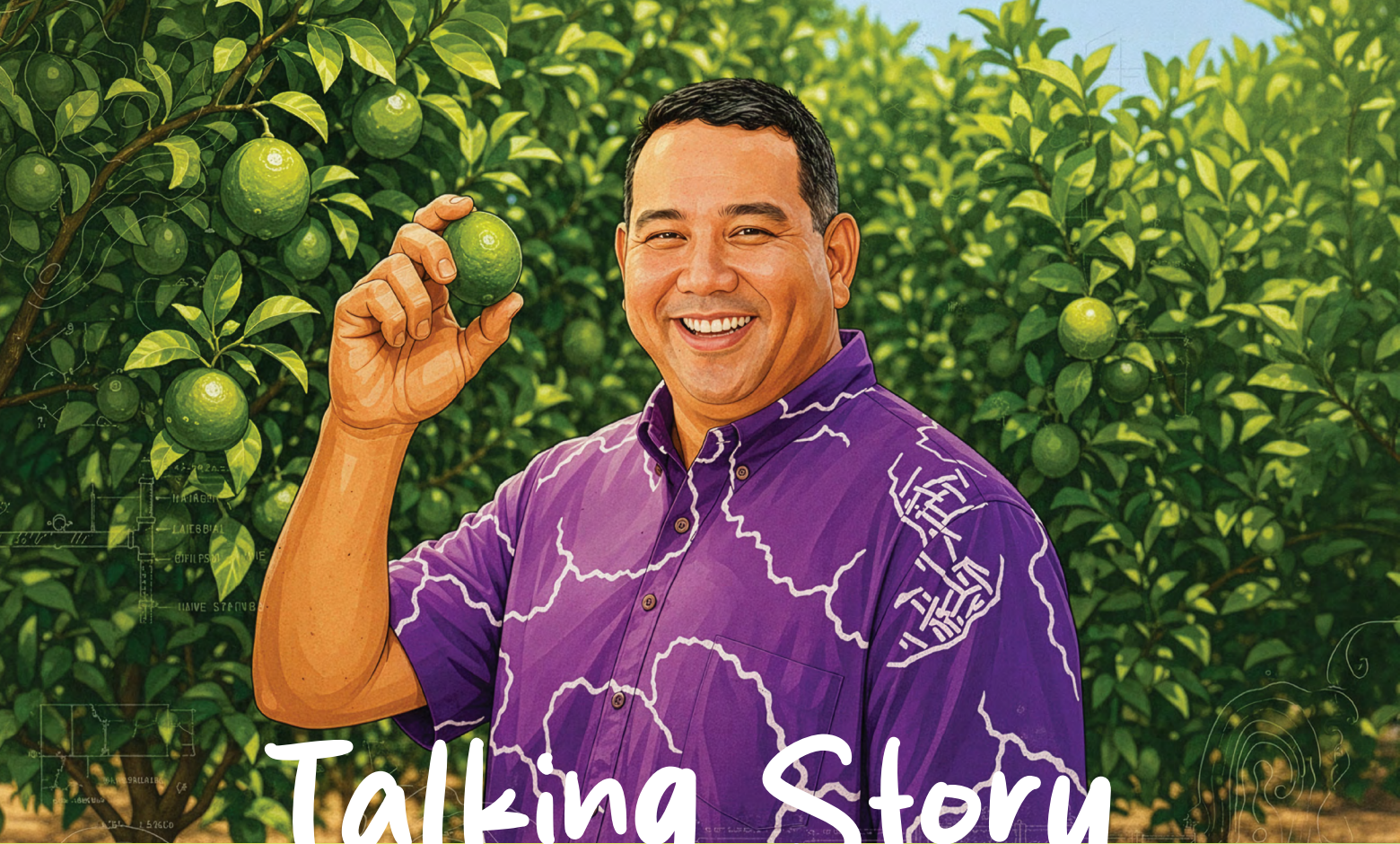


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Talking Story

WITH HFIA'S NEW CHAIR **JAYSON WATTS**

HFIA's new Chair, Jayson Watts, brings many years of valuable experience and also a new perspective to the role. As one of the Association's only Chairs from the agricultural sector, and from a neighbor island, Jayson has unique insights on our industry. He has long been involved with local politics, as well as local food. In addition to serving on HFIA Executive Committee he also serves on the Board of the Agribusiness Development Corporation. We took some time to get to know our Chair and hear some of his thoughts for the future.

How did you first get involved with Mahi Pono?

Joining Mahi Pono in 2019 was a pivotal decision for me personally. Because I had never worked in the private sector, my entire career up until that point had been rooted in public policy at the federal and state levels, and in the last few years focusing on how we might move the needle on Hawaii's food sustainability. This transition provided a real opportunity to move beyond the policy table and onto the production side to show that the goals we set for our schools, institutions, and local communities are actually achievable. A major part of that collective effort in government was establishing the Farm to School Task Force,

which eventually created the 'Aina Pono program as a public-private collaborative to bring fresh, local food to our keiki.

The work at 'Aina Pono was truly a group success that provided concrete proof that scratch-cooking and local procurement are viable. The data from the pilot at Mililani High School was a testament to what a dedicated staff can achieve, showing a 57% increase in student lunch participation and a savings of \$107,657 in just five months by reducing waste and improving efficiencies. Even with those results, there remains a deep-seated skepticism that increasing local consumption for our institutions on a significant scale is impossible. Joining Mahi Pono felt like the right time to "put your money where your mouth is" and work toward proving the skeptics wrong.

The scale at Mahi Pono is a game-changer for our local economy and food security. By revitalizing thousands of acres of former sugar land into a diversified hub of crops like citrus and coffee, the effort goes beyond farming; it is about diversifying our economy away from a singular reliance on tourism. The goal is to provide the consistent, high-volume supply that Hawaii's schools and state institutions need to finally break a long-standing reliance on imports creating a living reality for Hawaii, a legacy of fresh, locally grown suste-

nance for the next generation.

Can you tell us a little about your background in local politics?

My foundation in local politics and public policy was built on the legendary example of the late Congresswoman Patsy T. Mink. I was fortunate to start as a congressional intern and later serve as a staff assistant in her Washington, D.C., and Honolulu offices. It was a formative time that provided a front-row seat to her tireless advocacy, though it is funny to look back at the year 2000. It feels like a lifetime ago, it was a time when "Googling" was barely a verb, flip phones were the height of technology, and my morning routine involved physically reading and clipping seven different newspapers to keep the Congresswoman briefed.

Congresswoman Mink was a transformative force who spent her career fighting for the marginalized to ensure that all citizens could share in our country's promise. While she is most widely recognized as the principal author of Title IX, her fight for equity went much deeper. She was a fierce advocate for social justice, specifically focusing and the needs of women, children, and underserved populations. Her work championed the creation of a national daycare system and fed-



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAYSON WATTS

Left: Promoting Hawaii's diverse agricultural during the Chamber of Commerce's Hawaii on the Hill at the nation's capital! Joined by Senate President Ron Kouchi, Senator Rachele Lamosao, and Brian Miyamoto of the Hawaii Farm Bureau.

eral programs for early childhood education, such as Head Start, ensuring that the most vulnerable families had a path forward.

That commitment to underserved populations is a mission that continues in my work today, including my service with the Hawaii Food Industry Association (HFIA). In Hawaii, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is more than just a benefit; it is a critical lifeline for our community. On average, 160,000 Hawaii residents, roughly 11.2% of our population, rely on SNAP to keep food on the table. This program is a fundamental pillar for the health of our state, especially for our keiki, as SNAP enrollment often automatically qualifies families for critical initiatives like free school meals and summer nutrition programs.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JAYSON WATTS

With Congresswoman Mink at the Capitol and at the White House Congressional Picnic in the Summer of 2000.



PHOTO COURTESY OF HFIA

Through the HFIA, we work to protect this economic safety net and bridge the gap between local industry and the families who need it most. Much like Congresswoman Mink's fight for social-welfare initiatives, we are focused on ensuring that the systems meant to support our people remain stable and accessible. Whether it is fighting for the resources women and children need to thrive or supporting initiatives that connect local production to hungry families, the goal remains the same: ensuring our government and industry work together to improve the lives and health of every citizen in Hawaii.

What makes Mahi Pono unique?

What makes Mahi Pono unique is its role as the centerpiece of a historic shift in Hawaii's agricultural landscape, representing the state's largest experiment in large-scale diversified farming. Since acquiring roughly 41,000 acres of former sugarcane land in 2018, the operation has moved away from the century-old monocrop model to become a diverse producer, notably becoming the largest producer of limes in the United States. While the initial strategy focused on replacing imports for local schools and grocery stores, the sheer scale of the project and the millions of trees now reaching maturity have created harvest volumes that surpass local demand. This surplus is driving a strategic shift toward global and mainland export markets to ensure the long-term economic viability of the 41,000-acre project.

Beyond its production capacity, the operation is distinguished by its total stewardship of the East Maui Irrigation (EMI) system, a vast and historic water delivery network. Managing this infrastructure requires a unique blend of 19th-century engineering and 21st-century technology, utilizing automated sensors and precision irrigation to operate with significantly less water than previous plantation eras. Furthermore, Mahi Pono integrates a community-centric model that is rare for a large commercial entity; by allocating land and resources to independent growers through the Mahi Pono Community Farm, the company functions as both a major commercial producer and a foundational

support system for Maui's broader agricultural ecosystem.

Can you tell us about your work with the Agribusiness Development Corporation?

As a member of the Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC) Board of Directors, initially appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate in late 2022 and recently reappointed in 2026, I serve as the Board Chair with a focus on transforming Hawaii's agricultural landscape. Established by the Legislature in 1994, the ADC was created to provide the leadership needed to transition Hawaii's economy from the plantation era to a future of diversified agriculture. As sugar and pineapple operations wound down, the ADC was empowered to keep thousands of acres of arable land and complex irrigation networks in productive use for the public benefit.

Today, the ADC acts as a strategic driver of food security, administering more than 22,800 acres across Kaua'i, O'ahu, and Hawaii Island. With an 81% occupancy rate, the corporation provides the physical foundation for hundreds of local farmers, ranchers, and aquaculture producers who are essential to increasing our local food production. My role as Chair is to ensure our investments are transparent and strategic, particularly as we use the 2021 audit as a roadmap for reform.

Central to the ADC mission is the restoration and operation of historic irrigation systems that comprise our state's water heritage. These public trust systems include the Wai'ahole Irrigation System on O'ahu, a 26-mile engineering marvel delivering up to 12 million gallons of water daily, and the Kekaha Irrigation System on Kaua'i, which serves over 6,500 acres while providing renewable hydroelectric energy and vital flood control. We also manage the East Kaua'i Irrigation System, which supports nearly 6,000 acres of diverse crops ranging from traditional taro to tropical fruits.

A high priority for my current term is the 2026 acquisition of the Wahiawā Irrigation System on O'ahu from Dole. Anchored by the Wahiawā Dam and Lake Wilson, this system has the potential to support up to 17,000 acres of prime farmland. Completion of this acquisition is a true "win-win" for the O'ahu community because it includes a critical health and safety component: the remediation of the Wahiawā Dam to meet all applicable safety regulations and compliance standards. Stabilizing this system provides disaster resilience against flooding, mitigates wildfire risk by maintaining active green belts, and protects groundwater aquifers by providing high-quality R-1 recycled water for irrigation.

We are also focusing on "getting shovels in the ground" for nearly \$100 million in active capital projects, including the Wahiawā Central Kitchen and the Central O'ahu Agriculture & Food Hub. My long-term vision remains a self-sustaining agricultural economy



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Discussing the future of Hawaii with former Hawaii Lieutenant Governor and Mahi Pono COO Shan Tsutsui and USDA senior staff. We're working together to streamline the shipment of local produce, including Hawaii-grown limes, to the U.S. mainland.

that secures Hawai'i's food future. By preserving these lands and water systems, we protect the ability of future generations to grow food, support local economies, and maintain our islands' resilience. Every investment we make is moving us toward a future where farming is once again a source of opportunity, innovation, and pride for every island community.

What do you think are the biggest challenges our industry is facing for the future?

The most significant challenges facing our industry involve the inherent vulnerability of our supply chains and the advancing age of our critical infrastructure. Currently, Hawai'i spends an estimated \$3.1 billion annually on imported food, a capital outflow that represents a profound economic leak and leaves the islands dangerously exposed to global market volatility and logistics disruptions. This reliance on a "just-in-time" shipping model means that any external shock, be it fuel price spikes or port instability, directly threatens our baseline food security.

Specifically, we face a pervasive "resilience gap" where local producers are stymied by a lack of mid-tier industrial support. Without accessible aggregation hubs, regional cold storage, and modern processing facilities, even high-yield harvests cannot be moved efficiently to market or compete with the shelf-life of diversified imports.

Furthermore, the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, from catastrophic wildfires to flash flooding, threatens the integrity of the historic irrigation systems that serve as the fundamental backbone of our agricultural lands. These legacy water delivery assets are the lifeblood of production, yet they are increasingly vulnerable to environmental stress. Overcoming these hurdles requires a paradigm shift: we must move away from a model of costly, reactive repairs and toward a philosophy of proactive, strategic modernization of our essential land and water assets to ensure long-term statutory and operational stability.

What do you want your fellow members to know about you?

I want my fellow members to know that my entire career has been dedicated to find-

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Agricultural Regulatory discussions with USDA Assistant Secretary and senior staff at USDA Headquarters in Washington DC.

ing practical, scalable solutions to Hawaii's unique food sustainability and public policy challenges. My foundation in local policy was built working under the late Congresswoman Patsy T. Mink, where I learned firsthand the importance of tireless advocacy, accountability, and building systems that directly support underserved populations. I also want to extend my sincere thanks to the HFIA staff and leadership team for their exceptional

guidance and dedication as we navigate the evolving regulatory and economic challenges facing our businesses.

I believe effective leadership requires understanding both the policy table and the operational reality of the food supply chain. Through my work overseeing diversified farming operations at Mahi Pono and managing critical state land and agricultural water networks as the Chair of the Agribusiness

Development Corporation, I have focused on the proactive modernization of our essential production assets. I bring this blend of public policy experience and private sector execution to HFIA. I look forward to working closely with our leadership, staff, and our 200+ member companies—from retailers and manufacturers to distributors and brokers—to foster high-value networking, advance industry education, and build a resilient food system that protects our environment while enabling local businesses to thrive.

What do you hope to accomplish as Chair of HFIA?

My primary objective as Chair is to advance HFIA's mission of improving conditions across our entire food and beverage industry, ensuring that both our retailers and suppliers have the strength, sustainability, and resilience to thrive. Right now, Hawaii experiences a profound economic leak, spending an estimated \$3.1 billion annually on imported food. This creates a "resilience gap" where local producers and suppliers are stymied by a lack of critical mid-tier infrastructure, such as accessible aggregation hubs, regional cold storage, and modern processing facilities. By focusing on HFIA's core pillars of advocacy and industry relations, I want to thank our incredible staff and leadership for laying such a strong foundation, and work alongside them to champion the physical infrastructure and policy frameworks needed to move local harvests efficiently to the retail shelf.

Additionally, true resilience means safeguarding food security so that our industry can reliably serve the public, especially in times of crisis. Programs like SNAP are a fundamental lifeline for roughly 11.2% of our population, automatically qualifying vulnerable families for critical initiatives like school meals. Guided by HFIA's values of service and integrity, I am committed to strengthening our community relations and acting as a highly effective liaison between the food supply chain, non-profits, and government. Together, we will protect these economic safety nets, support local food manufacturing, and turn our shared vision of a strong, self-reliant Hawaii into a functional reality.

What makes you excited about the future of Hawaii food?

The future of Hawaii food is exciting because it is no longer just about consumption, it is about capacity. Through HFIA's dedicated legislative advocacy and industry leadership, we are building the physical infrastructure and the policy framework necessary to shift the needle.

HFIA is at the forefront of ensuring that Hawaii champions initiatives that support local food manufacturing and strengthen the ties between producers and the shelf, we are turning the vision of a self-reliant Hawaii into a functional, thriving reality for our entire island community. ❁

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REMEMBERING MAILE MIYASHIRO



This spring we lost a treasured friend, colleague, and leader, Maile Miyashiro. Maile was the immediate past chair of HFIA and Senior Director of Customer Experience at C&S Wholesale Grocers.

Maile got her start in the food industry working in hotel guest services in California. Even then, it was easy to see she was someone special. She was quickly promoted to Catering and Convention Service Manager, in spite of the fact that she had zero food service knowledge, because it was clear to see she had something even more important. The director that hired her said "I can teach you what you need to know about food service, and what I can't teach someone is personality."

Maile eventually brought her singular winning personality and vibrant energy to C&S Wholesale Grocers where she worked with Beau Oshiro. Beau was involved with

HFIA and encouraged Maile to participate. She started coming to events and joined the Social Committee in 2017. While her friend Charlie Gustafson of Tamura Super Market was serving as Chair of HFIA he encouraged Maile to take an active role in HFIA's leadership. In 2022 she joined the Executive Committee as Secretary Treasurer. She moved up to Vice Chair the following year, and then in 2024 became just the second woman to lead HFIA as Chair.

Maile's work on the Social Committee, as part of the Executive Committee, and as Chair has truly changed our Association and our industry for the better. She brought her vibrant energy to everything she did. She also worked with tremendous dedication to her customers, her company, and her community. When asked what she loved most about the food industry she said, "I really care about our customers and our commu-

nity. I know that what we supply, food, essential items, and technology, is vital to our customers and Hawai'i. It means a lot to me to be able to support our clients and our state in this way."

Even as Maile battled illness her dedication never waivers. She continued to work and stay engaged with HFIA and contribute even in recent weeks. Her beautifully recognizable smile and laugh never wavered either and will stay with us all. HFIA is deeply grateful and honored that Maile chose to contribute so much to our industry and our Association.

We join all those who knew her in celebrating her life, and grieving this tremendous loss. Our deepest condolences and heartfelt thoughts and prayers go out to her family and friends, and her team at C&S. She will be fondly remembered and deeply missed by us all. ❖

A vibrant border of tropical fruits and foliage surrounds the central text. It includes coffee beans, a green avocado, a mango, a pink plumeria flower, a pineapple, a watermelon, and other tropical leaves and flowers.

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The logo features a stylized profile of a woman's head with a red hibiscus flower in her hair, set against a purple circular background.



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ALL PHOTOS BY ANTHONY CONSILIO

Thanks to our amazing sponsors and attendees everyone was a winner! Our annual social is always so much fun, and such a great chance to connect with new and old friends and colleagues, and strengthen the ties that keep our industry strong. We want to thank our wonderful sponsors, everyone who came, and of course our Social Committee whose tremendous team effort and winning spirit makes this event possible. Mahalo!

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Thank you to all our amazing sponsors who saddled up and made this event such a success! Your support of our events is what enables HFIA to continue to advance our mission, we couldn't do it without you! Especially to our Title Sponsor Okimoto Corp.

Mahalo!



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GROCERY RUN HAWAI‘I

This April Startup CPG and HFIA Member Pint Size Hawaii brought an exciting new event to our food industry. Grocery Run Hawai‘i was a unique opportunity for food manufacturers to connect directly with retailers and showcase new products. HFIA was pleased to attend and get a chance to see many of our members on both the retailer and manufacturer side.

Daniel Scharff, Founder, Startup CPG explained what makes this event so special, “Startup CPG, the world’s largest community of emerging consumer brands, is proud to partner with Pint Size on our first event in Hawai‘i. By bringing together hundreds of leading Hawaiian and mainland brands with key retail buyers, we’re creating real opportunities for growth and distribution - places like Whole Foods, Foodland, Safeway, Down to Earth, Long’s, 7-11, and so many other top tier grocery, convenience, and foodservice outlets. Supporting emerging founders is our mission, and the excitement around this event has been incredible.”

We’d like to thank Pint Size and CPG for creating this valuable chance for businesses to connect, and we look forward to seeing some of these great new products on the shelves soon! 🌿



PHOTOS COURTESY STARTUP CPG



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COUNCIL FOR RESPONSIBLE NUTRITION

The Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN), founded in 1973 and based in Washington, D.C., is the leading trade association representing dietary supplement and functional food manufacturers and ingredient suppliers. CRN member companies produce a large portion of the dietary supplements marketed in the United States and globally. Our member companies manufacture popular national brands as well as the store brands marketed by major supermarkets, drug stores, and discount chains. These products also include those marketed through natural food stores and mainstream direct selling companies.



HAWAII COFFEE

Aloha! We are a family of sister companies, and we invite you to explore our delicious coffee and tea. In 1979, LION Coffee roared into life in Hawaii to focus on the only beans grown in America. Today, our iconic and cheery red bags are shipped to coffee lovers around the world and remain Hawaii's #1 coffee brand. Since 1969, Royal Kona Coffee has helped put Hawaii on the map for coffee connoisseurs. Before the world knew about Kona, Royal Kona Coffee was working with Kona Coffee farmers to share this unique and delicious coffee with the world. With volcanic soil, perfect elevation, and regular rainfall, it is an ideal coffee-growing location. For decades, Hawaiian Isles Coffee Roasters Co. has been a cherished brand amongst Hawaii residents and visitors alike. Hawaiian Islands Tea was born in 1995, right here in Hawaii to create exotic tropical fruit flavors, blended with premium tea leaves to create fragrant and flavorful tropical tea.



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MEMBER NEWS



HONOLULU FREIGHT SERVICE'S NEW HOME

Honolulu Freight Service has moved into new headquarters in Kalihi, at the former Love's building. The company completed renovation of the over ninety thousand square foot facility and moved in this March. Locally owned Honolulu Freight Services has been in business for 90 years. Their new home will allow the company to consolidate and streamline operations.



MOCHI FOODS LAUNCHES 2 NEW MIXES NEW MIX

Instant Mochi

Our Instant Mochi is a quick and convenient way to enjoy soft, chewy mochi anytime. Just add water and sugar, no baking required, to create the signature stretchy, bouncy texture that mochi lovers crave. This versatile product can be incorporated into a wide range of desserts and pastries, from mochi cookies and mochi croissants to wrapping ice cream and fresh fruit. Perfect for both home cooks and foodservice operators, it's an easy way to add a unique, chewy mochi texture to any menu.



FROZEN MOCHI CHURRO

Our Frozen Sweet Potato Mochi Churro brings a unique twist to the classic churro with a crispy exterior and a soft, chewy mochi center, filled with a naturally sweet potato filling. Designed for convenience, it can be prepared using an air fryer only, making it easy to execute with consistent results. The subtle sweetness and vibrant color make it a standout, eye-catching dessert on any menu. Perfect for operators looking to add a trendy, high-margin item, this item delivers both nostalgia and innovation in every bite.



ALOHA MADE BITES NEW PRODUCTION AND PICK UP LOCATION!

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We're growing - mahalo plenty to you! Visit our new production and pick-up spot at the Hawaii Country Club in Kunia! Nestled next to the Pro Shop, this cozy space is where every pie is handcrafted with aloha, made to share moments, memories, and blessings for you and your ohana. All pies are still made-to-order.

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Thank you for growing with us.



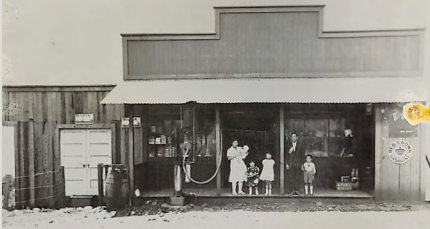


Welcome to Pukalani Superette!

Welcome to the Hawaii Food Industry Magazine's "Welcome To" series, where we catch up with some of the local retailers that make our island communities so special.

This issue we're meeting a unique local grocery store in Makawao Maui; Pukalani Superette has been an HFIA Member for over 15 years! Their President Megan Nakashima, is one of HFIA's newest Board Members and took some time to tell us about this special local spot.

Tanizaki Store before 1955.



Can you tell us a little about the history of Pukalani Superette?

Pukalani Superette was originally called Tanizaki Store, some of our older customers still call us by that name. My great grandparents, Takeo and Kome Tanizaki used to operate a small market in Wailuku that sold produce. They lost that business in a fire and decided to start over in Pukalani thanks to the suggestion of friends. Tanizaki Store was built in a time when Pukalani had mango orchards, a ton of guava trees, and pig farms.

In 1955, a larger store was built on the same property (the original store was kind of included in the new footprint, as they used to do back in the day). At that time, they chose to rename the store to Pukalani Superette to better reflect the community they were serving. My great uncle, Shigeo Tanizaki, managed the store and also served as the postmaster of the post office that occupied a portion of the new store. Over time, he chose to pursue his dreams in California and my grandmother, Sumiko, took over managing the store with the help of my grandfather, Aki Nakashima.

Currently, my dad and uncle, Aric and Myles, are the 3rd generation to own the store. My brother, Jayson, and I are both active 4th gen-

eration family members in store operations.

What's something the store is known for?

I would like to imagine that we're known for the role we play in our community. Which is kind of a crazy answer considering that we're a grocery store.

I would also like to imagine that we're known for being strong and reliable supporters of local farmers and family businesses. Some of our relationships go back generations. But a lot of people don't know that or aren't aware.

If you were to ask a random person, we would probably be known for our food. Tako poke, pork lau lau, kalua pig, chili chicken, potato mac salad. It never disappoints.

Upcountry Maui is a unique community, what's special about doing business there?

Upcountry is a bit removed from the more densely populated areas of Maui. The air is cleaner, and the people work hard. We have people that rely more on the land, roll with it when the weather is bad, and make do with less. This all amounts to people who are resourceful and realize that help might not be right around the corner. Because of this, they are outrageously generous with others in the area, whether it be in material, time, labor, or funds. There's a saying that I've heard many times, "Upcountry will take care of its own." Regardless of any issues we face, I am a proud member of this community.

What's a challenge that the business is facing?

Our business faces the normal challenges of finding workers, rising costs, and competition with larger big box stores. We also have those old building problems of ongoing maintenance. My brother and I have a running list of things that may have run well for the last 40 years, but should be phased out either for efficiency, or because we can't get parts.

How did you get your start at Pukalani Superette?

I grew up running through the aisles. A lot of the more tenured employees are my "aunties" and "uncles" from my childhood.

I worked at the store a few times during the summer in high school and college. I remember cashiering, but being too young to check out alcohol. I also used to wrap the lau lau.

I moved back to Maui in 2019 and gave myself the titles of Director of Community Outreach and Brand Manager. During the pandemic, my family decided that it was time to pass the torch and I became President.

Store opening 1955.



PHOTOS COURTESY PUKALANI SUPERETTE

What should we be sure not to miss when visiting Makawao?

Makawao Town is located across the highway from our store. The town has many shops and galleries by local artists and artisans. There, I would recommend going to Komoda Bakery and getting a stick donut. Hit up Polli's for killer nachos. Or if you have time, go to Makawao Public House for a cocktail and dinner. I normally also pop into Rodeo General Store to say hi, and to check out what new things they have going on.

In Pukalani, where we're located, there isn't a lot to visit, unless you're hungry. Go to Kalei's and have basically anything on the menu. Or get a cheeseburger from Wei Wei. There's also food trucks up the street, such as Kula Kups for a sweet treat or Alba's Cuban Coladas to get caffeinated. There's a farmer's market that's pretty darn good on Saturdays. Go early. If you want to stay in Kula you can visit Kula Country Farms hit up the alpaca farm, or Maui Bees.

Since you've already made it to Pukalani, you might as well continue on to Kula and Haleakala National Park. If you've never done it, see the sunrise or sunset at the summit. DO be prepared with a blanket and bring some snacks, but DO NOT feed the nene geese. ❄️

THE NEWLY FORMED O'AHU FEEDING TASK FORCE HELPS COMMUNITIES WEATHER THE STORM



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The recent Kona Low storm systems delivered a sobering reminder that food insecurity and disaster response are deeply interconnected across Hawai'i. Torrential rains, flooding, landslides, power outages and infrastructure damage affected communities statewide, with severe impacts on O'ahu's North Shore, Windward O'ahu, Maui and Hawai'i Island. Hundreds of homes were damaged or deemed uninhabitable, while farms, ranches and local food producers suffered widespread crop and equipment losses. For Hawai'i's food and agriculture sector, the storms highlighted the fragility of local supply chains and the importance of coordinated community response.

The O'ahu Feeding Task Force (FTF) is a Honolulu Department of Emergency Management (DEM) initiative collaborating with Hawai'i Foodbank, nonprofit, and private sector partners to streamline emergency

food distribution during disasters. The FTF was formed in 2025. Even though the Kona Lows were the first time the FTF has activated they were able to respond swiftly to the communities' need for food, water, and hot meals.

In addition to the Honolulu DEM and the Foodbank, the FTF includes a broad network of emergency food-response partners coordinated across O'ahu during disasters, including Aloha United Way, nonprofit relief groups, shelters, businesses, HFIA, restaurateurs and community distribution hubs. As the Kona Low storms approached, this network shifted into emergency activation mode, sourcing food, water and supplies to support displaced residents and flood-impacted communities across O'ahu.

As communities began assessing flood damage, coped with extended power outages, and began the clean-up and recovery process the FTF continued to assess needs and adjust to ensure that impacted communities had continued access to safe and nutritious food. Building on lessons learned from previous emergencies, including the Maui wildfires, COVID-19 response, and the

government shut down helped the FTF handle their first response well, while continuing to take on new lessons to improve for the future.

This activation demonstrates why the O'ahu FTF's disaster-feeding framework can achieve success: a coordinated public-private response designed to rapidly stabilize food access during major emergencies while supporting longer-term community recovery after severe weather events.

As the FTF lead, the Hawai'i Foodbank would like to mahalo all of our FTF members and the following private sector partners whose generous support and donations provided for impacted communities during the Kona Low Storms and beyond: Hawaii Foodservice Alliance (HFA), Safeway, Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii, C&S Wholesale Grocers, Armstong Produce, Tamura Enterprises, Pepsi Hawaii, BQF, Waiakea Water, Pint Size Hawaii, Fiji Water, Diamond Head Seafood, HPF Foods, Sun Noodles, and Menehune Water. We know that many other local businesses also contributed directly in their communities and were on standby to assist further. Mahalo to you all! 🌿



PHOTO COURTESY OF HAWAII FOODBANK

POWERING SMARTER OPERATIONS

How Hawai'i's Grocers Are Tackling Rising Energy Costs

BY HAWAII ENERGY



PHOTOS COURTESY HAWAII ENERGY

For Hawai'i's grocery industry, pressure is coming from every direction. Food costs remain unpredictable, supply chains continue to shift, and labor expenses are steadily climbing. Layered on top of that is electricity, one of the most significant expenses in daily operations.

Unlike other costs, energy is constant. Stores run long hours, and core systems rarely shut off. Refrigeration alone can account for more than half of a grocery store's total energy use, making it one of the most influential drivers of operating costs.

As utility rates rise, that reality is prompting more operators to reassess how their stores consume energy and where inefficiencies may be hiding.

RETHINKING ENERGY AS AN OPERATIONAL STRATEGY

Across the industry, energy is becoming less of a fixed expense and more of a strategic lever. It is one of the few areas that operators can actively manage.

In many stores, refrigeration and mechanical systems are designed to run at full capacity, regardless of actual demand. That approach ensures performance, but it also leads to excess energy use, higher utility bills, and increased wear on equipment.

By improving how these systems respond to real-time conditions, grocers can reduce energy consumption while also improving reliability, extending equipment life, and maintaining more consistent temperatures. In a business where margins are tight and product quality is critical, those operational gains matter just as much as the cost savings.

DOWN TO EARTH: INVESTING IN SMARTER SYSTEMS

For Down to Earth, a Hawai'i-based natural foods retailer and HFIA member, rising energy costs prompted a closer look at how its refrigeration systems were operating.

Through an initial system assessment with Pacific Refrigeration, the company identified that key refrigeration components across its stores were not adjusting to real-time demand. In some cases, systems were running at full power with no controls, while in others, constant-speed motors were limiting efficiency. In systems that operate continuously, even small inefficiencies can compound over time, increasing both energy use and mechanical strain.

To address this, Down to Earth implemented targeted upgrades at its King Street, Kailua, and Pearlridge locations, installing variable-speed electronically commutated (VSEC) motors, upgrading condensers, and reprogramming systems to better align with real-time conditions.

"Following the install of the VSEC motors at our Pearlridge location, we saw an immediate drop of about 250 kilowatt-hours per day, resulting in annual savings of roughly \$36,000," said Ariel Dugan, IT administrator at Down to Earth.

Beyond the immediate savings, the upgrades have led to more efficient and responsive system performance across stores.

"The biggest difference has been how our refrigeration systems respond now," Dugan said. "They're not running harder than they need to. They adjust to what each store actually needs, and that has reduced strain on the equipment and improved overall performance."

Down to Earth completed these improvements with support from Hawai'i Energy, including more than \$37,000 in rebates. In total, the

company is expected to realize more than \$800,000 in lifetime energy cost savings, while also improving system reliability and reducing long-term maintenance needs.

SUPPORTING EFFICIENCY ACROSS THE INDUSTRY

As the state's energy conservation program, Hawai'i Energy works with residents and businesses to reduce electricity use through a combination of technical expertise, financial incentives, and program support.

For commercial customers, the process often starts with identifying where energy is being used and where upgrades will deliver the strongest return. From there, Hawai'i Energy helps offset upfront costs through rebates and incentives, which can cover an average of about 20% of total project costs.

These incentives span a wide range of improvements, including refrigeration systems, lighting, HVAC, and commercial kitchen equipment.

"Energy is one of the largest controllable expenses for food retailers, and it touches nearly every part of their operations," said Caroline Carl, executive director of Hawai'i Energy. "When businesses invest in efficiency, they're not just lowering their utility bills. They're improving reliability, reducing maintenance, and creating a better experience for their customers."

To date, Hawai'i Energy has provided more than \$5.8 million in rebates to grocery businesses across the state, helping to offset costs and move forward with projects that might otherwise be delayed.

WHERE EFFICIENCY DELIVERS THE MOST VALUE

While every store operates differently, certain upgrades consistently deliver strong returns.

Refrigeration improvements remain one of the most impactful, given how much energy these systems consume. Simple upgrades, such as adding controls or installing high-efficiency motors, can deliver payback in as little as two years. Larger or more complex refrigeration projects often deliver a return on investment within two to eight years.

Lighting upgrades also stand out, often offering some of the fastest returns with relatively low upfront costs. HVAC improvements can provide additional savings, depending on system design and building conditions.

For many grocers, the most effective approach is incremental. Starting with projects that deliver quicker returns allows operators to reinvest savings into additional improvements over time.

Many of these upgrades can also be completed with minimal disruption. In some cases, work can be done during off-hours or overnight, allowing stores to remain fully operational.

A SHIFT THAT IS HERE TO STAY

What is emerging across Hawai'i's grocery industry is a shift in how energy efficiency is viewed, not just as a cost saving measure, but as a core part of operational strategy.

Beyond the financial impact, there are broader implications. More efficient systems help extend shelf life, reduce spoilage, and improve store environments. In communities across Hawai'i, particularly in areas with limited access to affordable food, supporting the stability of local grocers plays a critical role in maintaining access to essential goods.

For companies like Down to Earth, that shift is already delivering results.

As costs continue to rise, more grocers are looking to energy as one of the few areas where they can take direct action. Those that are not only reducing expenses, but they're also building more resilient operations over the long term, and being able to partner with programs like Hawai'i Energy helps make these improvements more accessible. ❁



CONNECTING THE PAE 'ĀINA

FACING THE CHALLENGES TO MOVE INTERISLAND SHIPPING INTO THE FUTURE

BY LAUREN ZIRBEL AND ALEXIS CHAPMAN

As an archipelago or pae 'āina it can seem like water is what separates each island from the rest, but the truth is water is what connects us. Shipping between the islands has always been a vital part of life in Hawai'i. Now more than ever, this essential artery is connected to almost everything in our islands. Agriculture and food security, preserving and promoting Hawaiian culture, sustainability, disaster management and resilience, local manufacturing, housing, and of course economic health and growth all depend on a having a functional interisland shipping system.

It's clear that interisland shipping is essential for our state. While there may not be consensus on the best changes to make, there is generally agreement that the current system is likely not as good as it could be. We must all work together to create improvements and ensure a viable interisland shipping system exists. Understanding some of the unique challenges of transporting goods between our islands may help us find a path to imua interisland shipping for the future.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC CHANGES WITH LOCAL IMPACTS

In recent years some global and local economic changes have exacerbated problems in our interisland shipping system and illustrated a critical need for change. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a massive reduction in economic activity across the state, which also impacted interisland shipping. As a result, Young Brothers requested and was granted a 46% rate increase.

Another 18% temporary rate increase for Young Brothers (YB) was granted in 2025 and a permanent 25.75% rate increase took effect in January of this year. These rate increases are in addition to any increase to the fuel surcharge the shipping customers pay which fluctuates as fuel prices change.

At the same time as the rate increase, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) denied a request to create a Water Carrier Inflationary Cost Index (WICI) which would have automatically increased prices. They explained their denial of the WICI stating:

"Water Carrier Inflationary Cost Index (WICI), a mechanism that would have permitted YB to automatically adjust its rates outside of a rate case was denied, given the commission's grave concerns with the substantially self-inflicted causes of YB's precipitous financial decline. The WICI would potentially have served to increase rates, offset inefficiencies and mask shortcomings in YB's operations, to the detriment of customers who ultimately bear these higher costs."

SB 2694 (2026) reverses this decision, and mandates automatic increases during the period the PUC had preserved from rate increases. The PUC stated in their rate case fact sheet, "YB is prohibited from filing any new general rate increase requests for at least two years. After this period, any future request must be supported by demonstrated progress on business transformation."

While rate increases may sometimes be necessary, they can also lead to a counterproductive vicious cycle. As rates go up for local companies and customers, it can disincentivize shipping and doing businesses in Hawai'i in general, which leads to even less cargo and makes the entire system less cost effective. The cost differential between interisland freight air-cargo is rapidly shrinking as YB's rates increase.

PROVIDING COMPETITIVE SERVICE WITHOUT COMPETITION

With the intent of ensuring continued service for routes that are not consistently profitable, water carriers are obligated to service all routes and prove they will not harm the existing water carrier, if they want authorization to ship cargo interisland. This system that essentially allows for only one interisland cargo shipping company to operate at a time was solidified when laws were put in place that create barriers to enter the market. The legislature amended HRS Section 27G-10 to state, "The commission shall not make a finding of public convenience and necessity nor issue a certificate if the evidence in the record indicates that the issuance of the certificate would diminish an existing water carrier's ability to realize its allowed rate of return..." This means that a company can't engage in interisland shipping in Hawai'i if it will financially impact the existing water carrier.

Globally, shipping is an intensely competitive industry. When transporting fragile or perishable goods such as food, reliability and service quality can matter just as much as cost in determining which carrier customers choose. In Hawai'i, when customers don't really have other options for shipping inter-island, and when dealing with inconveniently sized less than container load (LCL) shipments on barges that are not full, there are not strong incentives for delivering top notch service every time.

Unfortunately, for shipping customers the consequences of poor service can be devastating. When shipping food, especially temperature sensitive and fragile items like frozen goods or locally grown fruits and vegetables, temperature control and timely delivery can mean the difference between saleable goods and total loss. Young Brothers' new leadership team has responded to recent feedback about quality controls by appointing a new Customer Claims and Complaints Lead – you can find this contact in our recent HFIA Directory!

EFFICIENCY VS RESILIENCY VS PRICE

Shipping food successfully interisland is not just a matter of profitability in Hawai'i, it's a matter of survival for local businesses and local residents. The neighbor islands are producing food and other goods, and there is tremendous potential for growth in local agriculture and manufacturing there, but only if there is a cost-effective way to get goods to the population center on Oahu. This is also true for companies that want to produce locally and sell on the mainland or internationally. Neighbor island manufacturers who want to sell their goods on other neighbor islands often have to deal with interisland shipping twice, sending goods to Honolulu first and then to other islands. It's important to remember that local businesses already pay more than mainland businesses for almost everything from labor to power, fuel, real estate, and of course any materials or inputs that have to be shipped from the mainland or overseas. Adding interisland shipping costs on top of all that makes it extremely hard for local producers to maintain competitive pricing compared to overseas producers who are just shipping a finished product.

When it comes to food, pricing isn't just about how we do business, it's about how we live. For many Hawai'i families food is one of their top expenses every month. Statewide we already pay more for food than the national average. On the neighbor islands the prices are even higher, due in part to interisland shipping. This high cost of food creates economic challenges for residents, and cost of living is one of the major factors that drives Hawai'i residents to leave the state. High food costs are also a driver of food insecurity. The latest number from the Hawai'i foodbank calculated show that 26% of households on Oahu experience food insecurity. For Kauai County it's 32% of households, and for Maui County and Hawaii County it's a shocking 41% and 42% respectively. That means that 4 out of 10 families in those parts of the state don't have enough food to live an active healthy lifestyle.

The food insecurity situation in Hawaii, especially on the neighbor islands is already a crisis. But if and when we face a natural disaster or other emergencies it could get much worse. If a disaster like a hurricane or tsunami impacts the neighbor islands at the end of a shipping cycle when food reserves are already low, and if there is damage to ports that prevent an emergency delivery, then a disaster becomes a catastrophe.

And potential changes to make the interisland shipping system more efficient could exacerbate this. Shipping just one container a week to Molokai might be more efficient than the current system, but it could leave the island vulnerable and less resilient. Of course, on the flip side, adding shipments or opening additional ports on neighbor islands would make them more resilient, but would add shipping costs for businesses and residents.

There are no easy answers when it comes to prioritizing efficiency, resiliency, and cost. Striking the right balance will depend on compromise, weighing pros and cons, and potentially being open to new solutions. Some people may not immediately think of air cargo as a cost effective option for inter island shipping, but it already plays an important role in moving freight around the islands. Air cargo can be a vital resource when it comes to emergency shipments, or goods that simply won't travel well via ship.

LOOKING TO OUR NEIGHBORS AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Hawai'i is of course not the only archipelago in the world. The Portuguese Azores, the Spanish Canary Islands, and many of our neighbors in other parts of Polynesia grapple with similar issues.

In the Marquesas the company Aranui combines cargo shipping with cruising to create a unique experience for tourists and to provide a vital lifeline for small island communities. Having combined ships that accommodate passengers as well as cargo means that the company has two revenue streams. Profits from passengers help offset the challenges of shipping small cargo loads.

In the Canary Island interisland shipping is heavily controlled by the regional government. The regulatory structure prioritizes public

service obligations to guarantee service frequency, capacity, and price. The government has the power to set minimum service levels and calculate standard costs for shipping units. When necessary subsidies are provided to shippers to ensure the system functions. To ensure transparency and accuracy of the data that the government is using to make these calculations, there is a mandatory reporting system for interisland shippers.

However, even in the Canary Islands the government allows competitive bidding for routes (including subsidized routes). The government defines certain routes as essential for connectivity, especially to non-capital islands, and puts them out to tender to ensure specific service frequencies, capacities, and prices. When a route is deemed to have insufficient free competition to meet public needs, the ministry issues a tender. For example, as of early 2026, the OSP (Public Service Obligation) for the maritime line between El Hierro and Tenerife has gone to tender, with requirements for 12 weekly frequencies and specific capacities. To keep maritime transport affordable, the government provides subsidies for goods transported between islands, with higher percentages (up to 100% of subsidizable costs) for routes connecting to smaller "non-capital" islands, and 50% for high-volume routes like Tenerife-Gran Canaria.

The truth is that globally the shipping industry is simply not designed for shipping small amounts of cargo small distances, but that is what Hawai'i needs in order to stay connected and survive. Other places have found ways to create local shipping systems that meet their needs, rather than forcing their business and residents to meet the needs of global shipping. If they can do it, then Hawai'i can and must find a way to do this too. Our businesses, our residents, our pae 'āina, needs to stay connected with interisland shipping, and we need to work collectively to change the current system so that it works best for Hawai'i and for us all. ❀



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THE LAST WORD

BY LAUREN ZIRBEL

This spring brought a number of unexpected challenges for both our Association and our state. Successive Kona Low storms caused devastating flooding across many communities, with impacts that will likely be felt by local agriculture for years to come. But through every challenge, one thing remains constant: the strength of our HFIA 'ohana. Time and again, our members step up to support one another and our community. Following the Kona Lows, many HFIA members came together to assist those affected, while others joined us at the Legislature this session to testify on important issues impacting Hawai'i's food supply chain. That engagement and willingness to lend your voice is what makes our Association so strong.

These challenges are a powerful reminder of how important it is for our industry to stay connected, engaged, and resilient. Hawai'i's food supply chain continues to face significant pressures, from food insecurity

and inflation to rising fuel costs, workforce shortages, and increasing operational expenses. These issues impact every part of our industry and every community we serve. But when we come together—sharing ideas, supporting one another, and speaking with a unified voice—we are far better prepared to navigate whatever lies ahead. That spirit of collaboration has always been one of HFIA's greatest strengths.

Convention remains one of my favorite times of the year because it brings our industry together in a way that few other events can. It's an opportunity to reconnect with colleagues and friends, celebrate the work we've accomplished together, and have meaningful conversations about the future of Hawai'i's food industry. Every year, I leave inspired by the passion, innovation, and commitment of our members. The relationships built through this Association are what make HFIA so special, and they continue to remind me why this work matters so deeply.

This spring, our HFIA 'ohana also experienced a tremendous loss with the passing of Maile Miyashiro, our immediate past Chair



and Senior Director of Customer Experience at C&S Wholesale Grocers. Maile was an extraordinary leader whose impact on our industry and our Association cannot be overstated. She brought energy, authenticity, and genuine aloha into every room she entered, always making people feel welcomed, valued, and supported. Over the years, she helped shape HFIA through her service on the Social Committee, Executive Committee, and ultimately as Chair, leading not only with vision, but with kindness and humility. ❀

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