Welcome
Welcome to Ka Mana: Hawaii’s Interfaith Energy & Climate Connection, a project of Hawaii Interfaith Power & Light (HIPL). Ka Mana connects our interfaith, decision-making, and advocacy communities in Hawaii’s historic transition to 100% renewable energy and a carbon-neutral economy. Inspired by shared values, effective action, a sense of urgency for fossil-fuel-free Hawaii futures ASAP, and a vision of social, economic, and environmental equity for all, together we can do this! Welcome to this Historic Moment.

Food, Faith, Culture, and Climate
For Faith Climate Action Week, IPL’s celebration of the week surrounding Earth Day, the theme is “Sacred Grounds”, emphasizing the importance of the food that nurtures our bodies and souls. Our modern food systems have contributed significantly to human-induced climate change due primarily to how we grow and produce our food. Thus, fundamental changes to what we eat and how we grow that food are needed to faithfully respond to the climate crisis.

In Hawaii, we import more than 80% of our food. This stands in stark contrast to the self-sufficiency, indeed abundance, of food production by native Hawaiians before European contact. The State of Hawaii has set a goal of doubling local food production by 2030 and of net greenhouse gas neutrality by 2045. While we are making good progress in the areas of energy and transportation, we have no clear plan of action to achieve food sustainability.

In this issue of Ka Mana, we highlight some of the cultural and religious community groups who are working from a foundation of faith and the core values of aina momona, the fertility and richness of the land that feeds us, to transform Hawaii’s food systems and communities.

Backyard & Church Food Production
There are a growing number of efforts to promote local food production right in our backyards and church grounds. Nationally, “urban agriculture” is now a growing field of applied science and outreach to the public. Church of the Crossroads in Honolulu hosted Eric Assadourian, senior fellow at the Worldwatch Institute, as its 2016 Watada Lecturer. Mr. Assadourian is a developer and promoter of the reality TV series “Yard Farmers”. Crossroads has also for years maintained a church garden, managed by its youth as part of their religious education program. It also has planted ulu (breadfruit) on its grounds, a traditional food staple and multipurpose tree in Hawaii and throughout the Pacific. Christ Lutheran Church in Mililani is hosting an Eagle Scout project that has created community garden plots on the church grounds. How many of our churches in Hawaii have beautiful green space in the middle of urban environments covered in concrete and asphalt? How many of these could host community gardens to help address the food insecurity many of our most vulnerable families and communities face?

Culture & Faith Feed Our Communities

Behind “church row” on Kailua Rd. and the Windward Branch of the Honolulu YMCA is a cultural treasure and sacred place in Hawaii, Ulupo Heiau. It is bordered on one side by Kawaiinui Marsh, traditionally a wetland that provided abundant food and other resources for Hawaiians. Kauluakalana, a Hawaiian nonprofit,
now manages this special place and has expanded a network of lo‘i kalo, wetland taro ponds, plots of ‘ulala, Hawaiian sweet potato, ‘ulu trees (breadfruit), and other traditional foods in Hawaii. The goal of this effort is not to demonstrate traditional agricultural systems, nor is it to sell the food to restaurants or touristy farmer’s markets. Instead, these efforts are to feed the community, build relationships, and create a model of abundance and sustainability. The vision is to connect these efforts to others around the marsh and extend them into Maunawili Valley, recreating a food basket for Kailua and windward Oahu.

Some of the land between the churches and the heiau has been used for temporary shelter by houseless community members. Instead of shunning or running them off, Kauluakalana has worked with the local churches to feed and coordinate needed social services for these community members. In turn, some of these folks help with the cultivation of food and maintenance of these sacred grounds. For many faith traditions, service to “the least of these” is a moral duty and reflects the mercy and compassion of our Creator for us, the Created. These efforts feed our souls, not just our bodies, and strengthen not only our communities but also the abundance and vitality of our natural environment.

Fostering a Climate of Sustainability

How do these examples, however faithful and commendable, align with our need to respond to the climate crisis? As mentioned, our food systems contribute significantly to net greenhouse gas emissions in various ways, from use of fossil fuels in food production to simplification and degradation of plant communities to loss of soil organic matter and health. Regenerative agriculture in community gardens, indigenous agriculture and agroforestry, and other systems can help reverse these trends. Uniform lawns of closely cropped grass on compacted soils, heavily irrigated and fertilized, can be replaced by diverse, nourishing community gardens, filled with organic-rich soils, worked by the hands of numerous families and community members, and providing fresh, local food that only needs to be transported from garden plot to kitchens and dining room tables. Traditional Hawaiian agricultural systems depend upon the richness and health of our soils, the flow and quality of water in streams and springs, and the diversity of plants, both wild and introduced, to feed the community.

These systems benefit from diversity and lots of organic matter. And we don’t mean just of the plant kind. To cultivate ‘āina momona requires indigenous knowledge and wisdom and the work of many hands, reconnecting people and communities to that which feeds and nourishes us.

Can these examples of backyard, church, and community gardens, and the regeneration of indigenous Hawaiian production systems contribute to Hawaii’s goals of local food production and reversing climate change? If “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”, then our religious communities can and should be at the forefront of these efforts. As we go forth from Earth Day and Faith Climate Action, let us embrace food as something feeds body and soul and can help us respond faithfully to climate change and help restore Hawaiian culture and the abundance of our islands.