



# PRESS RELEASE

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## TAKAHASHI FARM TO REMAIN IN AGRICULTURE MA'O FARMS GROWS YOUNG LEADERS AND HEALTHY FOOD

**WAI'ANAE, LUALUALEI VALLEY, HI** – MA'O Organic Farms (MA'O), and The Trust for Public Land (TPL) today announced MA'O's acquisition of the 11-acre Takahashi Farm property, a move which MA'O's founders believe will let local agriculture remain in the community in perpetuity. MA'O plans to use the parcel as a permanent home for its organic farming operations and youth leadership programs.

MA'O (the acronym for mala 'ai 'opio, which translates as "the youth food garden"), is an extension of the Wai'anae Community Re-Development Corporation (WCRC), an umbrella organization whose mission is to develop a self-sufficient Leeward coast. As part of the WCRC's vision, MA'O has worked for the past eight years to institute its MA'O Community Food Security Initiative, which has developed youth leaders, used local agricultural land in an economically and environmentally sustainable manner, and led local, national and international conversations around sustainable food development.

Currently, MA'O leases five acres of land in Lualualei Valley and operates a certified organic farm that generates high quality produce, educates the community on nutrition, trains future entrepreneurs, and sends interns to college. MA'O's produce is sold at health clinics, farmers markets, natural food stores, award winning restaurants (Nobu's, Roy's, Alan Wong's and Town). Whole Foods recently selected MA'O as one of its first local suppliers in Hawai'i. In addition to being one of the leading practitioners of sustainable agriculture in Hawai'i, MA'O is also in the business of youth development.

The bulk of the MA'O work force is comprised of young adults from the Wai'anae community, who are hired as a part of the organization's Youth Leadership Training (YLT) program. Interns work on the farm 20 hours a week and are given a \$500 monthly stipend and a tuition waiver to Leeward Community College. Currently, there are 25 YLT interns of which a high percentage are Native Hawaiian and first generation college attendees. The addition of the 11-acre Takahashi Farm parcel will allow MA'O Organic Farms to increase its productivity and educational programs.

"This is a important first step to finally making Hawai'i food self-sufficient. It also is a big step to bettering our community," says Kainoa Aila a YLT intern.

Kaimana Pine of WCRC agreed. "The accomplishments of Wai'anae youth are tremendous; the recent land acquisition will help further the practices of sustainable agricultural handed down from previous generations. With supporters and community the movement continues in a larger capacity, and promises that we'll continue to invest our time and mana'o into our youth and their future."

Pat Takahashi, the former landowner and retired Wai'anae teacher is happy knowing the land will continue in agriculture, saying: "I grew up here, my family farmed here. I am grateful to see that this land will continue to feed the people of Hawai'i and plant seeds of leadership in our community."

MA'O acquired the \$959,000.00 property with funds from Hawai'i's Legacy Lands Program funds and generous support from the Pierre and Pamela Omidyar Fund at the Hawaii Community Foundation.

"The State of Hawai'i is proud to partner with Trust for Public Land, MA'O Organic Farms and other nonprofit organizations in acquiring this property and preserving the land in agriculture," said Gov. Linda Lingle. "Through this innovative program, MA'O Organic Farms is teaching Hawai'i's youth about the importance of organic farming and developing sustainable food systems for our community."

Last June, Gov. Lingle recognized MA'O Organic Farms / Wai'anae Community Re-Development Corporation with the Governor's Innovation Award for its programs to improve the lives of young people from O'ahu's Leeward Coast and mobilize them to become leaders and "agents of change" in their community.

"We were pleased to connect MA'O Farms with the Omidyars who are a donor and client at HCF," says Kelvin Taketa, president and chief executive officer of Hawai'i Community Foundation. "In this case, it was a perfect match considering the opportunity to greatly increase the business and social impact of MA'O and the interest of Pierre and Pam in supporting sustainability efforts throughout the state."

Senate President Collen Hanabusa, said, "MA'O Farms has long embodied what we mean when we talk about a sustainable Hawai'i. Their contributions to the Leeward Coast community, the continued viability of agriculture as an economic force in Hawai'i, and our ability to produce our own food demonstrate what we can achieve in our state. I am very pleased to see them acquired a permanent home and a place where they can continue to build on their success and provide a model for our sustainable future."

House Speaker Say said "MA'O Farm provides a very valuable public service that deserves continuation for the betterment of Hawai'i's organic agricultural industry and youths who participate in the program."

"It is so appropriate that MA'O Organic Farm is the first group on the Wai'anae Coast to receive a Legacy Lands award, said Rep. Maile Shimabukuro (D-45<sup>th</sup>). "The demand for their organic produce exceeds supply, so the purchase of additional land from the Takahashi family was long overdue. MA'O brings great pride to our community by inspiring a new generation of 'opio, or youth, to be farmers and socially conscious entrepreneurs. The interest in MA'O's food security studies program at Leeward Community College keeps ballooning."

TPL provided transactional and technical assistance to MA'O Organic Farm in the real estate transaction. "At the Trust for Public Land we believe deeply in the connection between land and people. It is an honor to be a part of project like this," says Lea Hong TPL's Hawaiian Islands Program Director.

Map and photos available by email (lea.hong@tpl.org) upon request.

The Trust For Public Land is a national nonprofit land conservation organization founded in 1972 to conserve land for people. In Hawai'i, TPL works side by side with land trusts, community groups and public agencies to protect lands important to the people of Hawai'i.



## MA'O COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVE

a non-profit 'aina-based project of the Wai'anae Community Re-Development Corporation

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