



Photo: Youth in Hawaii's most genetically diverse Kalo (taro) patch in Honoka'a, HI

**The 2018 Intertribal Agriculture Council (IAC) Pacific Region Native Youth Food Sovereignty Summit** brought 31 youth from nearly 20 Tribal Nations from California, Nevada, Hawaii, New Mexico, South Dakota, and Oklahoma together for 3.5 days of experiential learning involving traditional and local-scale agriculture, natural resources, and leadership development programming. This year's summit took place on the Island of Hawaii in a town called Kapaau, King Kamehameha's birth place. The summit was held at the Kohala Institute, a beautiful property with sprawling gardens, ponds, and forest. USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), The Swift Foundation, and Toiyabe Indian Health Project were invaluable partners in bringing together these exceptional youth for this all-expense paid meaningful event. Many youth participants commented that they had never been on a plane before, let alone attending a youth-led/focused event in Hawaii!



Photo: Native plant identification exercise at Kauhale Garden Site, Kapaau, HI

The first day of the summit, Wednesday, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018, was dedicated to holding a leadership training for the Student Leadership Team. Prior to settling in at the Kohala Institute, our Cultural Liaison (a youth leadership position designed to ensure traditional protocols were adhered to for the duration of the summit) recited an Oli, a traditional Hawaiian chant asking permission for

guests to enter the ancestral Hawaiian territory and to stay for the duration of the summit. Upon receiving permission, we unpacked and began the student leader training. The curriculum, like the entire agenda, was developed in coordination with youth leaders who stepped up to bring this summit together. Team building exercises, presentations focusing on leadership, and summit logistics were the focus of "Day-1" activities centering on the Student Leadership Team.

Youth participants started arriving early on Thursday, November 15<sup>th</sup> into Kona International Airport and were met by the Student Leadership Team and Adult Chaperones. The first activities were held at the University of Hawaii, Hilo and included a kīpaepae (traditional Native Hawaiian opening ceremony), traditional string hand game and chant, and a bento box meal. The activities served the necessary purpose of breaking the ice and welcoming the youth participants onto the ancestral Hawaiian lands and into the community.

On Friday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, the youth participated in a presentation with a group called Na Kalai Wa'a, who are traditional Hawaiian canoe voyagers. They discussed the process of growing traditional foods and processing and canning them for use on overseas excursions. Next, the youth participated in a native plant identification activity at a traditional garden site called Kauhale which was a favorite site of the late Hawaiian King Kamehameha.

Following this experience, the youth enjoyed a tour of Island Harvest's macadamia nut operation and orchards. The youth competed against a mechanical harvester to attempt to "vacuum" more macadamia nuts up within a given timeframe than the machine- it was a close race!

Natural Resources Conservation Service- Pacific Islands State Conservationist, Travis Thomason gave a talk on leadership to the youth and area staff led a healthy soils demonstration that involved hands-on soil testing. In the evening, presentations were offered on topics involving community initiatives and leadership in food and agriculture. The final activities that night included traditional tea leaf lei making and fish net throwing.



Photo: Comparing macadamia nut harvest in Island Harvest's orchard in Kapaau, HI

On Saturday, November 17<sup>th</sup>, fieldtrips to several sites had been planned. The first stop was in Honoka'a at a farm ran by the Kohala Center (unaffiliated with the Kohala Institute). The youth took a tour and got to experience Hawaii's most diverse Kalo (taro) patch, containing over 300 varieties of this traditional staple food. The next stop was the Waiuli Loko i'a traditional Hawaiian fish pond, where students assisted with refurbishing a pond wall with lava rocks. A presentation was offered on the functionality and history of the fish pond as a traditional agricultural endeavor. Next the youth were provided their one opportunity to swim at the beach or go into town with chaperones to purchase souvenirs. Many who chose to swim interacted (from a distance) with sea turtles.



Photo: NRCS soil health demonstration, comparing soil characteristics



Photo: Assisting with lava rock wall at Waiuli Loko i'a fish pond

Saturday evening marked the pinnacle experience of the entire summit. Our Hawaiian host family worked with community members to prepare traditional Hawaiian foods for all summit participants. Meal items included, freshly netted fish, kalo (taro), breadfruit, fern salad, kalua pork, coconut dessert, among other items. Hawaiian singers and dancers performed during dinner. The youth dressed up in their traditional regalia and participated in a cultural sharing experience that included songs, dances, games, stories, and other activities.



**Photo: Ione Miwok youth offering a song during summit culture sharing evening**



**Photo: Youth learning traditional tea leaf lei making**

The final day was Sunday, November 18<sup>th</sup> which was dedicated to student group presentations. In addition to all the activities the youth participated in, the youth were divided into Student Leader-facilitated groups to identify participant interests, goals, and opportunities for further engagement in food and agriculture leadership upon returning home. The four groups all presented on ways to remain engaged by establishing their own projects, engaging Tribal leadership within their communities, and working to inspire other youth to get involved. The summit ended with a heart-felt gift exchange activity that paired youth with someone they had not connected much with during the summit, to exchange a small gift and make a meaningful connection to build unity among the participants.

Since the summit, youth have written articles that have been picked up by their local newspaper, started/ furthered community garden projects, stepped up to help plan and facilitate the 2019 IAC Pacific Region summit, and work with Native support programs at their local school district to identify potential project sites for future community based local foods initiatives. One of the primary takeaways experienced by all participants, including the leadership team, involved how central agriculture in Native Hawaiian communities continues to be and how many social, cultural, and historic similarities tie us together.