

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

# Hawaii farmers' cooperative awarded \$250,000 USDA grant

**Waimanalo, Hawaii – October 24 2016** – *Friends with Farms Agricultural Cooperative*, based in Waimanalo, has won a grant from the US Department of Agriculture to aggregate and market the production of small local farmers on the island of Oahu and beyond.

The \$249,121 grant was awarded by the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and is part of the USDA's Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP). The *Friends with Farms* proposal was the only one selected from Hawaii among the 50 FMPP grants totaling more than \$13.4 million that were [announced by Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack at the New York Times Food for Tomorrow Conference](#) on September 28.

The "Small-AGG" project proposed by *Friends with Farms* will use the grant funding to help small farmers achieve economies of scale by aggregating their production and selling it directly to consumers via farmers' markets and a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.

"Small farmers face big challenges," says La'amea Lunn, President of *Friends with Farms*, "not only do they need to grow their crops, they also need to find a way to sell what they produce. Marketing and distribution are a major cost and time drain, as well as a significant business risk."

The situation in Hawaii is more difficult than elsewhere because the vast majority of farmers are small-scale producers. On O'ahu, 743 of the island's 999 farmers produce on only 1-9 acres, according to the USDA's 2012 Agricultural Census. Many of these small farm operations lack the scale to offer a steady and sufficiently large supply to customers.

"We think we've found a systemic solution to one of the main problems facing farmers and the industry on O'ahu," says Paul Arinaga, Operations Manager for the cooperative. "We're going to help O'ahu's small farmers achieve success while staying independent and small. With our model, there's no need to create giant industrial-scale farms in order to be successful."

Aggregation will allow O'ahu's many small farmers the chance to pool their production. Through the Small-AGG project *Friends with Farms* will then sell this production online via the CSA, at farmers' markets and through other channels. Initially, the cooperative plans to offer weekly or bi-weekly baskets of fruits and vegetables to subscribers along with some optional extras, and then expand its offering over time.

The larger aim of the Small-AGG project is to increase the number of farmers on O'ahu and enhance Hawaii's food security.

"It's well-known that we import as much as 85% or more of our food," says Sean Anderson, cooperative Vice President. "That's crazy considering how isolated Hawai'i is geographically and thus vulnerable to shipping disruptions. We are also blessed with excellent, nearly year-round growing conditions here. Things could be different."

## About the Friends with Farms Agricultural Cooperative

*Friends with Farms* is a cooperative of farmers who share resources to provide wholesome food for the people of Hawai'i grown with principles of Aloha 'Aina (love of the land). We take an active role in building a resilient farm ecosystem by growing food with respect for living soils without the use of synthetic chemical pesticides, herbicides, and other harmful substances. The cooperative values multiple perspectives and methods of farming including indigenous practices, permaculture, natural farming, biodynamics, aquaponics, and organic farming. [www.friendswithfarms.com](http://www.friendswithfarms.com)

*Friends with Farms* is present at the Kailua Farmers' Market every Sunday from 8:30 am-12:00 noon at Kailua Elementary School, 315 Ku'ulei Road, Kailua, Hawaii 96734

To receive news and updates from Friends with Farms about the Small-AGG project, please visit:  
[www.friendswithfarms.com/contact/](http://www.friendswithfarms.com/contact/)

### **About the Farmers Market Promotion Program (FMPP)**

The purpose of the FMPP is to increase domestic consumption of, and access to, locally and regionally produced agricultural products, and to develop new market opportunities for farm and ranch operations serving local markets by developing, improving, expanding, and providing outreach, training, and technical assistance to, or assisting in the development, improvement, and expansion of, domestic farmers markets, roadside stands, community-supported agriculture programs, agritourism activities, and other direct producer-to-consumer market opportunities. [www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/fmpp](http://www.ams.usda.gov/services/grants/fmpp)

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