



Editorial | Insight

Hawaii's food insecurity: 3 major aspects of food availability

By George Kent

Posted September 18, 2016

September 18, 2016

Gov. David Ige's call for doubling the production of food in Hawaii by 2030 faces severe obstacles, as recognized by columnist Lee Cataluna ("Ige's dreams for the future ignore today's harsh reality," Sept. 7) and the recent editorial ("Worthy food goal faces obstacles," Our View, Sept. 9). The biggest is that the reasons for pursuing this goal and the methods for doing it are not as clear as they should be.

Many make the common error of equating food self-sufficiency — producing what you consume — with food security. According to the United Nations Committee on World Food Security, "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life."

Three major types of food security should concern us:

>> The need to ensure ample supplies of good food for the general population now and into the future.

>> The need for attention to the special needs of low-income people. Far too many depend on federal government programs and food pantries that offer free or very cheap food.

>> The need to plan for emergencies of various kinds such as interruptions in shipping to Hawaii or failures in local food production caused by agricultural diseases, terrorism, or other factors.

The state government has not given much attention to any of these. It ignores the alarms raised by the Hawaii Foodbank and other private agencies, and there is no serious plan for dealing with the various types of food supply emergencies that can be imagined.

There is not much discussion of what foods should be produced. Macadamia nuts? Coffee? Basil? Many of the agricultural commodities produced in Hawaii are not food at all, but seeds, feed for animals, flowers and various ornamentals. Much of the food produced here is exported, as was the case with sugar and pineapple, and is now the case with beef. Most of the beef produced here is consumed elsewhere, and most of the beef consumed here is produced elsewhere. Not much of the food produced here is basic in the sense that it's what you want to have if the ships stop coming.

Increasing purchases of locally produced foods would benefit local farmers, but it could also mean higher food prices. Hawaii imports much of its food because it cannot produce the food as cheaply as it can import it.

Farming generally provides relatively low incomes for its workers. There is something peculiar about saying we should stop importing food from poor countries, and then importing people from those countries to work on our farms.

There are many things that could be done to support the agriculture sector in the state. That should not be confused with the need to ensure the food security of all the people under all conditions.

We don't need arbitrary targets to increase production of unspecified products by an arbitrary date. We need serious long-term planning by the state to deal with all three major types of food insecurity.

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manakuke says:

September 18, 2016 at 12:24 am

Hawaii's agricultural industries brought the State into the 20th century. With limited land and a growing population we still need to eat. Proper planning will always be essential.

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