

Press Release – Grown on Maui Bus Tour Connects People to Their Food

**By Lani Weigert, Hawaii AgriTourism Association
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For the first time ever, A Grown on Maui Bus Tour will operate every Tuesday beginning May 18, 2010 from 830a to 3pm. Bookings are now being taken by calling 891-4604 or emailing info@akinatours.com and offered to both local and visitors alike to get an “up close and personal” experience of Maui’s agriculture by visiting the farms. Operated by Akina Aloha tours, this tour is intended to provide people with a “one of kind” experience that is enjoyable, interesting and engaging. We used to transport our Kupuna (elders) years ago to pick up their fresh produce, and it’s an honor today to teach people the importance of connecting with their food, says Cassie Akina, Akina Aloha Tours CEO.

AgriTourism is another way to sustain a farmer allowing them to take their traditional agricultural practices and expand that effort into hospitality and education. Additional revenue also comes from value added products such as jellies and jams made from their crops. Inviting family and friends to farms has occurred for generations and has helped to sustain farmers for decades, says Warren Watanabe, Executive Director of Maui County Farm Bureau. Now this special experience is being offered every week to visitors and local residents.

The “new” visitor is seeking experiences that teach, inform, and engage. Everyone seeks an authentic “experience” that is enjoyable and memorable, says Lani Weigert, President of the Hawaii AgriTourism Association. People want to know where and how their food is grown. Local residents and visitors alike are strongly encouraged to take this entertaining and informative tour. Feedback from participants who already took the tour, exclaimed it was the most unique experience they had on Maui. I love the special access we get by being part of this tour, said a visitor from Iowa. Local residents commented that they remembered when they worked in the old pineapple cannery in Kahului during the summers, and how being on the tour, reminded them of those “good ole days.”

Everyone meets at Whole Foods Market where a “behind the scenes” tour is provided to teach people how to shop on a budget by knowing the layout of the store. Delicious samples of seafood, beef, cheese, chocolate are offered throughout the tour, and a continental breakfast of locally sourced fruits, coffee and breads are provided. The importance of farmers having a place like Whole Foods Market to offer their fresh produce to the public is paramount, says Elize Ditzel, Whole Foods Marketing. No matter where a person lives, buying locally sourced foods is important to the sustainability of its community, says Warren Watanabe, Executive Director of Maui County Farm Bureau.

The next stop is at Hali`imaile Pineapple Company, where the staff shares a brief history of growing pineapple on Maui and how their farming operation has evolved today. See how pineapple is grown and learn the interesting facts about choosing the sweetest pineapple in the supermarket, says Darren Strand, President of Hali`imaile Pineapple Company. Hear the untold story of how this company rose against all odds, to save the Pineapple industry on Maui, said Terry Vencl, Executive Director of the Maui Visitor’s Bureau. It’s a very inspiring story.

The tour proceeds to O'o farm, where a plethora of different crops are grown. Providing a unique culinary experience of using the freshest farm ingredients, prepared in creative ways that bring forth all the delicious flavors nature has to offer is our focus, says Chef and Co-owner James McDonald.

After lunch, its on to Ali`i Kula Lavender farm, where the tour starts on a sweet note of creamy Lavender Chocolate Gelato made by Ono Gelato in Paia. Take the first and only Lavender walking tour and discover the "Language of Flowers. " Buy a Lavender Scone for the road and find out why these scones are so famous! Relax and enjoy" everything lavender" and have a "Beautiful Lavender Day," says Alii Chang, Co-owner and Lavender Grower.

Tour ends at Whole Foods Market for those who wish to shop before returning to their cars.

For more information go to www.akinatours.com, email info@akinatours.com or call 808-891-4604. Reserve your seat for the Grown on Maui Bus Tour today by contacting your activities desk, concierge desk or Akina Aloha Tours. Tour operates every Tuesday beginning May 18, 2010 from 830a to 3pm. The price is \$130.00 per person, plus tax. Advance reservations are required. Kama'aina rates are available.

Hawaii AgriTourism Association, Maui County Farm Bureau and Maui Visitors Bureau endorse this tour.

There are no children's rates available on this tour, however parents may still choose to take older children (12+) who are interested in learning about agriculture on Maui. Inquiries on student tours can also be made by emailing info@akinatours.com.

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