

# Niu Now, Niu Forever

*by Chelsie Onaga*

*MA'O Farms Communications and Special Projects Coordinator - March 8, 2021*



In late February of last year, we began to work on the 2020 Ho'ola 'Āina Youth Food Sovereignty Congress and integrating NiU Now!, an event in which Congress participants could experience this indigenous tree resource, the niu, or coconut tree in (k)new ways. Then the pandemic hit, and we canceled all in-person events. The stay-at-home mandate created an opportunity for us to rethink how to gather in community spaces to collaborate. We saw webinars as a platform to bring awareness to food sovereignty and specifically to raise an important conversation around niu and its benefits to our food security.

The pandemic awoke an awareness around the deep reliance our community has on imports for our food. This sparked conversations and interest in figuring out (k)new ways to increase food security by planting niu (coconut seeds). Fast forward to June, we hosted the first episode of the webinar series, NiU Now! for our love of coconuts.

The enthusiastic collaboration with self-proclaimed niunates Indrajit Gunasekara, Manulani Meyer, Ngahiraka Mason, Nat Tuivavalagi, Noelle Kahanu, Vilsoni Hereniko, Mahi La Pierre, and many others created a rich, moving and action-oriented partnership. At the root of this series is Indrajit's passion for niu. Understanding his Sri Lankan culture and his personal ties to niu guided all of us on this journey by looking at niu in a different light. It's not just ornamental or food; it nourishes and connects all of these resilient communities across Oceania.

At our first webinar, MA'O General Manager Kauī Sana, shared her vision of a niu grove at MA'O. With the help of Indrajit, Aunty Manu, Aunty Ngahiraka, and some niunates, they began to gather niu from O'ahu and created niu nurseries at several community sites. In subsequent webinars, the hui continued to meet, share knowledge and experiences, and move ideas into action to restore niu as an important food crop for our communities.

This January, Kauai, Operations Director Gary Maunakea-Forth, and the Farm Apprentices went to Hale O Waolama in Pālehua to harvest 200+ niu and bring them home to the farm in Lualualei, Waiʻanae moku. It was a beautiful morning of uprooting the niu keiki and preparing them to be replanted alongside ʻulu trees at our Palikea location. We can't thank Indrajit and the niunates enough for involving MA'O in this revolutionary movement of bringing back the niu groves to Waiʻanae.

Enjoy a few clips from last year's Niu Now! Webinars here:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/7703272>



Charnel Collins of MA'O Farms gathering niu seedlings from Waolama, Palehua to plant at Palikea, Lualualei Valley