



The Maui News / EUGENE TANNER photos

Jodi Dias, 9, of Haiku Elementary School, shows off the creation she made from vegetables, fruits, grains and seeds. Dias says she

got the idea for her artwork from a picture she saw in a magazine. She participates in the Health Education Lunch Project.

# Students in Haiku get 'HELP' in making good food choices

By CLAUDINE SAN NICOLAS  
Staff Writer

**HAIKU** — One student claimed he had never eaten broccoli before, and another said she hadn't ever tasted a cucumber. Both munched them down happily as Haiku Elementary School launched a hands-on, food-based curriculum project that could serve as a model for the state.

"This for me is a dream come true," said California nutrition consultant Jennifer Raymond, who got the money to do the project and is collaborating with two others to carry it out.

The program is called the Health Education Lunch Project (HELP), an attempt to stimulate classroom learning and improve children's food choices. The idea behind HELP is to make nutrition fun and interesting in the classroom, so that when children eat in the cafeteria



Visiting nutrition educator Antonia Demas explains to students the different kinds of healthful food.

Cadman and New York nutrition educator Antonia Demas, cooked up the pilot project that will run through March at the school.

methods, brought fruit, vegetables and grains into the classroom, tempting children to eat them.

though many confuse it as a vegetable."

Once all the foods were identified and categorized, the children were to create a piece of art using the edibles on brightly colored plates. Among their choices were cucumbers, celery, carrots, kidney beans, romaine lettuce, purple cabbage and rice.

Third-grader Max Benoit picked out a piece of broccoli almost immediately. "I've never had broccoli before," the boy said. "It's pretty good," he said later after a bite.

Once the tasting was completed, Demas gave a short demonstration on salad bar etiquette. Like many schools around the state, Haiku will be offering a salad bar for children to select their own fruits, vegetables and grains.

Demas wheeled out a student-sized salad bar wagon and showed the children how to use tongs correctly and to avoid spilling food.

# Students get 'HELP' with food

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Children were also reminded not to lean on the salad bar rails, to turn away from the food when sneezing and to exercise caution when squeezing salad dressing out from a bottle.

Third-grader Brenden Burk said he looked forward to the salad bar and suggested it carry lots of celery and cucumber, and "some tomatoes and some lettuce."

Brenden's classmate, Ryan Bair, recommended that sunflower seeds and boiled peanuts be part of the salad bar. "They taste kind of sweet," he said of the peanuts.

Their 3rd-grade teacher, Marilyn Pascher, said even though Demas' nutrition lesson took away precious classroom time that could have been spent on other topics, she found the food demonstration to be valuable.

"Timing is everything. With the salad bar coming, it's good to have them on the inside and it helps the acceptance of it. I think it's positive," she said.

Aside from the salad bar, the children at Haiku Elementary will be tasting many more new dishes this month from a combination of Raymond's own recipes and Cadman's concoctions.

Hawaii was chosen as the site to premiere HELP because of the state's high incidence of heart disease, adult-onset diabetes, hypertension, kidney disease and obesity.

Hawaii was also chosen because its public school system has universal menus. In California and other places, the menus, according to Raymond, differ from school to school.

Raymond said she selected Haiku School because of Cadman's leadership and commitment. "He is totally dedicated to getting kids to eat healthier foods," Raymond said.

When Cadman came to Haiku in March 1996, he developed his menus to offer choice to the children. They

choose either a traditional meat-based entree or a plant-based or vegetarian meal. Participation in the school lunch program has increased from 70 percent to now 90 percent of the students.

Cadman chairs the state Department of Education's Menu Planning Committee and has shown interest in incorporating healthful changes on the statewide menu developed through the pilot project.

Demas, who's traveled across the country teaching nutrition for many years, also dished out praise for Cadman. "I've never been in a school that had healthier food," she said.

From the Haiku experience, Raymond hopes to develop a video and action guides for use in schools nationwide. The guide will include teaching material, recipes, information on the experience at Haiku and potential pitfalls.

Details of the Health Education Lunch Project (HELP) will be shared with parents during a Haiku PTA meeting set for 7 p.m. Tuesday at the campus cafeteria. Dinner will be available for \$1 per person.

Raymond and Demas are traveling to Oahu today to demonstrate the hands-on, food-based curriculum during a general membership meeting of the Vegetarian Society of Hawaii.

Last spring, with the help of the Vegetarian Society and sponsors like Hawaiian Electric Co., the American Cancer Society and Castle Medical Center, Raymond conducted nutrition and cooking demonstrations for cafeteria managers around the state.

She said many of them expressed interest in serving healthier foods, but all doubted that students would eat them. Raymond's hoping the Haiku experience will change that. "We want to develop a love for food and a safe environment to try new foods," she said.