

Leiana Apo Kaua'i other 2nd

Salt production in Hawai'i is an extremely sacred and unique practice, a part of its cultural heritage. In Hawaiian culture, salt or *pa'akai* is used for cultural healing and medicinal usage, both physically and mentally. *Pa'akai* is utilized for preserving and seasoning fish and meat for longer periods of time. The future of these traditional practices and significant historical sites are threatened due to climate change, development, and pollution. They're roughly twenty-two families with their own designated salt beds passed down generationally, at Hanapēpē salt beds. Where each family continues to practice in the cultivation and traditions of producing salt throughout the year and years to come. These families preserve the labor-intensive tradition and complex practice by hand, involving long hard hours of hard work and dedication. We are one of very few places on earth that produce *pa'akai* in clay salt beds(ancient).

Native Hawaiians have been producing traditional *pa'akai* for over a thousand years. *Pa'akai* means "to solidify the sea," the solid form of the ocean water. *Pa'akai* was an important factor in the daily lives of Ancient History and Hawaiians, also known as "Hawaiians gold."The "ancient gold," is utilized for various purposes and methods taking lots of time, humility, hard work and perseverance to produce. *Pa'akai* was and continues being used to preserve or add flavor to food. It's also used for spiritual and physical healing, ceremonial practices, and spiritual purification of a person, place or thing.

There's many *mo'olelo* or stories behind the legends and beginnings of Hanapēpē *pa'akai*. One story started in a time where Kaua'i went through a time of famine and scarcity of food. Hi'iaka had been generous in her gathering of fish one day and caught way more fish than her family could consume in the day. On her way home to the uplands, she noticed her big fresh catch had begun to spoil. Feeling overwhelmed and frustrated she went back to the ocean to gather more food. The feeling of guilt and distress filled within her knowing she had wasted the blessings of food from the sea, she sat on a shore and began to weep and cry. Pele, the fire goddess her sister felt pity for her and brought her to a short walk above the shore digging a shallow well that allowed water to seep through from underground. She dug a shallow bed advising her sister to place her fish in the salt bed, rubbing the salt all over the fish and leaving it to dry out helping preserve the catch for her long journey back to her family. This story and its background was known to have been an important natural resource and influence on the lifestyle of the early Native Hawaiians.

Nevertheless, cultural history and traditions will always play an important role in the cultivation, preservation and perpetuation of Hanapēpē *pa'akai*. Our people were excellent, efficient and successful at being self sustainable. Unfortunately, erratic water patterns and rising water temperatures have been impacting salt production over the years. Lately, Kaua'i as a whole has been experiencing king tides and coastal erosion all around. Causing negative outputs towards shorelines and nearby coastal infrastructures, especially the landscape in Hanapēpē Salt pond. Ruby Pap, a coastal land use agent for Hawai'i Sea Grant stated, "You can see the evidence of erosion problems from sea wall

and sand bag construction along areas in Kapa‘a, Hanalei, Anahola, Kekaha, Po‘ipū...70% of Kaua‘i beaches are chronically eroding and this is evidence from over the past century. With sea level rise which will add anywhere from 1-6 or more over the next century, those impacts will be greatly magnified. Scientists say, Kaua‘i is also expected to see more wave runup, passive flooding and groundwater flooding.”(TGI) Meaning that if we don’t find a solution to help prevent or slow down erosion, our entire cultural practice at Hanapēpē salt pond will be lost and underwater.

In addition to Hawaii’s ancient history and culture, Hanapēpē Salt evaporation ponds are also very unique in geological features shallow enough to hold salt water and self evaporates to produce salt crystals. The amount of *pa‘akai* depends on natural resources such as, the amount of sun, clay, ocean salinity, brine shrimp and ocean tides. Scientist among the geocaching website mentioned, “The conditions need to be just right to harvest salt. You need to have an ideal geological formation of the shallow ponds at an optimal elevation, all in a relatively arid climate. Season begins when summer starts and ends when the rains come. During a good season you can start around May and finish in September,”(ibpaul). Within the last decade, erratic water patterns and rising water temperatures have been causing major flooding in the salt making area. Our salt is produced through solar evaporation, the purest form of salt produced in the world. Lately, climate change has taken a big toll on the preservation and health of Hanapēpē *pa‘akai*. Many flash flood storms and waves have been overflowing and eroding the infrastructure of the salt beds, ruining the years supply of *pa‘akai* and hard work.

In the times of King Kamehameha the Great, Hawai'i was an independent self sustainable nation. However, Western contact has negatively influenced its practices and traditions, such as the salt beds at Hanapēpē. There are many things that possibly pollute Hanapēpē salt ponds. One of the major things polluting these ponds is development and terrible driving. When it rains runoff, debris and dust on top of asphalt can float into the salt ponds/beds and pollute it. Young people often think its cool to rope donuts or drive fast which eventually allows more dust and sand traveling towards the beds. Another large pollutant is the cesspool right next door to the salt beds, managed by Maverick Helicopter Company. Salt Pond is an economically beneficial area, and this company is seeking to exploit it, they don't care how important this practice is. They only want money and wealth, they claim to want to share the beauty of the island but fail to help protect it. All the waste from the cesspool is absorbed by the land polluting the salt ponds and near the ocean where families and their kids play and collect food. They fly over the ponds creating chaos for many, flying dust, sand and other debris into the ponds which make it impossible to take out of the clay beds or even the salt itself. Homeless people live near the salt ponds and pollute the ponds a few different ways. They don't have good hygiene, which poses a health issue since the salt is used by locals to flavor and preserve food. It is also traditionally thought that if a person doesn't have *pono* intentions near the food then the food would spoil, and it is unlikely that the homeless people living there bear this in mind. If they are sick and unable to afford healthcare, then they could pollute the salt by transmitting their sickness, which could then make the people who use the salt sick. In many cases,

animals can pollute the ponds by leaving their feces close by, allowing harmful bacteria into the salt making it unsafe to eat and use.

With the emergence of all these problems concerning the ponds, numerous solutions have been thought of. One of the more prominent is building a fence about half a mile out from the salt beds. Helping to reduce pollution towards the beds from animals, homeless people, and vehicle trafficking by enforcing a border to conceal a protected area. In order for any of these changes to take place, it has to be a community effort. If numerous community members were to complain and express their legitimate worries to the state then hopefully these changes would be approved, accomplished and NOT ignored.

In conclusion, Hanapēpē Salt beds are on the brink of lost tradition and cultivation of locally produced *paʻakai*. Threatened by climate change, development and pollution, they are continuously jeopardized. The traditional practices and biological features unique to the site face an ongoing onslaught of threats, undermining their future. Loss of Hanapēpē salt ponds would lead to yet another huge loss to the Hawaiian culture and traditions of Hawaiʻi. We can protect the salt ponds by getting the community more informed and more involved, by speaking for and doing right by the Hawaiian culture.... It's crucial to protect this area from pollution and other occurring disasters that may interfere with the production of salt because, without the extremely praised and sacred salt production many other occupations wouldn't be able to be perpetuated or practiced. Without the sacred "gold," how would the cultural practitioners of Hawaiʻi perform blessings? How would the sacred historical site be

remembered? Native Hawaiians Have been perpetuating the traditional practice of *paʻakai* for thousands of years, it's extremely crucial to know the background and history that's an important part not only to Kauaʻi but to Hawaiʻi as a whole.

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