

Featured Farmer: Gerry Ross and Janet Simpson Kupa'a Farms, Kula, Maui



Area under production: 4 acres non-certified organic

Years farming in Hawai'i: 12 years

Crops grown, animals raised, other products/ services: Diversified vegetables, tropical fruit, and coffee

Number of employees and/or family members involved: No employees, 2 family members, and up to 6 interns

Production System

Fertility management: We use crop rotation, compost from food waste, and cover crops with supplemental compost tea applications, feather meal as solid amendment, and liquid fish through our drip system.

Pest Management: We have used trees such as seedless Leucaena to attract beneficials to take out scale insect with excellent success. Imported cabbage moth is a seasonal problem but we handle that with Bt and/or growing brassicas in an enclosed screen house. Our dry climate is conducive to spider and carmine mites but we use organic sprays for control when necessary. Our biggest problem is root knot nematode and we are faithful about crop rotation and using non-host cover crops such as Piper sudan grass, sunn hemp, grasses and mustards for control.



Food Safety: Common sense.

Strategies for controlling costs: We make use of the local waste stream for a portion of our fertility. We make compost from 25 tons of food waste a year, use residue from local coffee roasters to increase soil organic matter, and use local rock powder rather than imported to mineralize our compost.

Production planning: Juggling seasonal crops such as coffee, mangos, and longon with weekly vegetable production is a challenge. We have a simple spread sheet we use to plan

vegetable production in fields, and 27 raised beds and a calendar for weekly seeding of annual vegetables to make sure we have a consistent supply for our customers that accommodates changes from summer to winter production.



Marketing Strategy

Pricing: We use two approaches. First is based on how much human effort is required (time in the ground, harvest, post-harvest washing) and price accordingly. Second we check out some of the local food stores that sell organic and then knock 10% off the price. Since all of our sales are direct we get paid better than wholesale and the customer pays less than typical retail. We also

assess uniqueness of product such as out of season mangos, potatoes, or garlic.

Promotion: Word of mouth. If you have great quality your customers do the advertising.

Product characteristics: We strive for quality even if it means we have to miss a week of sales. That is better than selling poor quality. An anonymous quote goes “The sweetness of low price is forgotten much faster than the bitterness of poor quality.”

Places you sell your products: Farmers markets, direct to restaurants, and a weekly CSA program in its eighth year.

Approaches to keeping up with market trends: We always experiment and try new things. Almost everybody seems to be growing kale these days so we have cut back and grow other things instead.

Could you give us an idea of the future for you operation?

What does sustainability mean to you and how to you plan to ensure Sustainability for your operation?

To us sustainability is all about soil conservation, using the waste stream as a resource, building a farm that is close to a complex ecosystem (we make extensive use of diverse wind breaks and leguminous shade trees for coffee) and keeping our family in the black.



Explain how the next generation successfully integrated into the farm, how it happened or didn't happen?

We took the farm over from Janet's parents and took it from a conventional corn and asparagus farm into a diverse organic polyculture farm.

Challenges you expect to face in the next 5-10 years:

As we get older it will be hard to maintain the diversity of crops and degree of physical labor. We anticipate trimming down the number of crops we grow (over 40), while trying to maintain income levels. We likely will have to change market outlets but we are starting the discussion on how to manage the next decade.



New products or services you are planning:

We are one of the few farms to grow organic potatoes and garlic. We also have a 3000 ft² high tunnel that we put up with funding from NRCS and it is covered with insect screen rather than solid plastic. We are experimenting with tomatoes bred for organic greenhouse production with excellent success.



Janet Simpson and Gerry Ross, taken by Carla Tracy of Maui News

HOT TIPS from Kupa'a Farms

- › Tap into the waste stream to cut your fertilizer costs and build soil fertility.
- › Consider a high tunnel with insect screen—these have amazing potential!