

Featured Farmer: Christian Zuckerman, Manager Kahumana Farm, Waianae, O'ahu



Area under production: We recently expanded from 8 to 24 acres. We currently have almost 5 acres in vegetable production and 5 acres in fruit trees. In the next year we plan to continue to expand production on the new land.

Years farming in Hawai'i: We have been a diverse farm using regenerative and biodynamic methods since our community was founded in 1978. Kahumana is a part of a large 501©3 non-profit organization, and the farm is one of its many programs. Prior to 2007 the farm was primarily a place of learning and vocational training for families transitioning from homelessness, people with disabilities, and youth. Reconnecting with the land through farming is a key stepping stone toward leading a more healthy, productive, and balanced life. Since 2007 our farm has focused primarily on commercial production, while continuing to serve our community and integrating our social programs.



Crops grown, animals raised, other products/services: Our major crops are baby greens and several root crops, primarily multicolored carrots and beets. We also grow a lot of kale, swiss chard, bok choy, leeks, and herbs. We also produce eggs with 500 layers.

Number of employees and/or family members

involved: 1 full time (me) and 8 full time apprentices (1-year) with stipend. We also generally have 3 WOOFers (2-4 months). Our 8 café employees and participants from our Learning Center for people with developed mental disabilities also lend a hand.

Production System

Fertility management: We are certified organic. We make our own compost from green waste and food waste. We rely on cover cropping heavily: buckwheat and sunhemp are our primary species. We supplement plant nutrition with foliar application of fish emulsion and sea kelp.



Pest Management: When I took over management 5 years ago, we spent a lot of time screening varieties for pest resistance and adaptability to our location. We rotate crops and intercrop with flowers to attract beneficial insects. Our main insecticide is an on-farm produced combination of Neem, chili pepper and garlic. We will occasionally use a pyrethrum based pesticide (Pyganic) when infestations are heavy.

Food Safety: We are planning on food safety certification in the near future. We currently employ GAP practices and our processing area is covered with a cement foundation and stainless steel sinks. We can also process in our certified kitchen if needed.

Strategies for controlling costs: This is most challenging part of our operation. The key to controlling costs is detailed record keeping regarding yields and knowing costs of operation.



Production planning: We actually plant seasonally. Our main planting period for our greens and root crops is September to June. We scale back in the summer and focus on cover cropping, but we also plant heat tolerant crops like cherry tomatoes, eggplants, okra, etc.



Marketing Strategy

Pricing: I set our price by talking to other growers and buyers and depending on our supply (we'll drop our price if we have a surplus). Price needs to be above cost of production and is often near 50% of retail price at retail outlets like Whole Foods Market and Down to Earth.

Promotion: Previously we would make cold calls on restaurants with samples and business cards. Now we rely on word of mouth as well as on-line marketing tools.

Places you sell your products: We sell primarily to restaurants (70%) as well as farmers markets (15%) and CSA and on-farm sales (15%).

Approaches to keeping up with market trends: We work with chefs to try new things and listen to our customer base to see what they want.

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?

It's important to create a self-sustaining ecosystem while remaining financially viable and emotionally content.

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

We expect our primary challenge to be keeping up with cost of living, staying solvent, and dealing with climate change. We are already observing very different weather patterns.

New products or services you are planning:

We are expecting to increase our veggies and fruit, especially citrus, mango, and avocado. We also plan to add broiler chickens to our operation.



HOT TIPS from Kahumana Farm:



1. Be keenly observant to determine what's working and what's not.
2. If you want to be successful at farming you have to put in 150% effort 100% of the time.