

Feature Farmer

Lourdes Torres & Emilio Ruiz-Romero

Sustainable Boost

Kealia, Kaua'i

Area under production: 3 acres

Years farming in Hawai'i: 3 years

Crops grown, animals raised, other goods & services?

We raise crickets for human consumption and grow papaya, banana, turmeric, ginger, pacific spinach, and lemongrass. In addition, we source taro, breadfruit, cassava, moringa, oranges, and lemons from other local growers to produce our flours and powders. This month we are also releasing a new pancake mix with all local ingredients that was developed in collaboration with the culinary students at Kauai High School.



Crickets you say?! Why raise crickets for human consumption?

Around the world there are more people who eat insects than people who don't. Crickets are a great source of efficient protein that has a smaller environmental footprint than other livestock, and they taste delicious. We were featured last year in an article for *Hawai'i Farm & Food* that focused more on our cricket production. Check out the article "When Bugs Are Food" <https://www.hawaiimagazine.com/content/when-bugs-are-food>

Number of employees and/or family members involved?

In addition to the two of us, we have 5 employees and 11 local farmers that we source from to keep up with demand.

Production System & Fertility management

Cricket frass is our primary fertilizer. This was the plan: farm crickets and try to create a sustainable circle. A 2013 report from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United

Nations (FAO) mentions the value of cricket frass as fertilizer, and this seems like a good potential for keeping crop yields up using a locally produced material. We also grow what we feed our crickets—Pacific Spinach. They love it!

Pest Management

We follow organic practices and encourage this from the other growers we are contracting with as well, though we are not certified organic yet.

Food Safety:

It is better to be safe than sorry. We are a little bit neurotic about it almost: making sure that we label everything, have no cross-contamination, follow strict practices in both our farming and processing. We have been getting as much training as possible to learn and keep up with the most recent food safety recommendations.



Strategies for controlling costs:

Processing our flours and powders is especially expensive because it requires a lot of manual labor. We offset this now with help from friends who volunteer in exchange for product. In the future we hope to invest in upgrading our equipment to industrial size machinery for mechanization to reduce labor costs.

Were you impacted by the flooding in April 2018?

Our primary farm site is at Kealia, and the whole site was under 4' to 8' of water during the flood last year. We lost everything that we had in the field and all of our equipment. We are still in the process of recovering financially. There was no crop insurance and very little help. We were able to keep our business going by sourcing more from other local farmers while we got

our production started again. It was very serious, and three neighboring farmers in our hui were not able to recover and are no longer farming.



Marketing Strategy & Pricing:

We understand the costs to grow and process, and we aren't trying to compete with large stores like Costco on price point. We target the premium market: our product is locally grown, the highest quality, nutritionally dense, and sold in fully compostable packaging. Consumers are shaking the hand of the producer with a local and sustainable product, and they are willing to pay the premium.

Places you sell your products:

Farmers markets five days a week and some online sales.

Promotion and keeping up with market trends:

There is increasing community interest in food production, how far it has traveled, and how it's grown. Most of our flours and powders are ultra-unique products. Nobody else in Hawaii is doing cricket powder or green banana flour, and very few people are selling taro and 'ulu flour. They are shelf-stable and do not require recipes. You simply add a sprinkle to your everyday foods. I say they are magical dust for your smoothies and balance the traditionally high sugar content from the fruits.

Give us an idea of what the future holds for your farm!

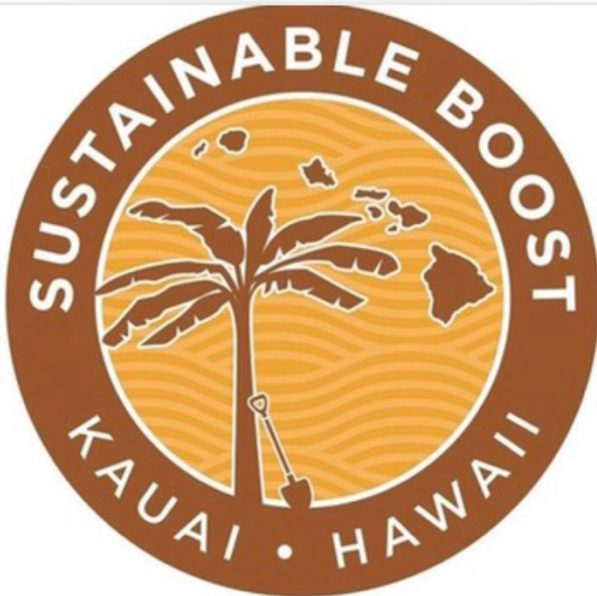
In the future we have plans to scale up cricket production to be able to offer Hawaii the opportunity to further diversify local protein sources to include another sustainable, high-yield option. We also want people to get over the "ick" factor and start to get comfortable with eating crickets. In my humble opinion, if you can eat a shrimp or a lobster (the insects of the sea) you can eat a cricket.

New products or services you are planning:

Dehydrated, flavored, whole crickets coming soon! Flavors are being sourced locally and will include powdered seasoning from Uncle D's BBQ on Kauai and others.

What advice you would give to other aspiring farmers?

You have to be willing to work your booty off, and yet find a way to do it strategically. Start small. Understand your crop fully and completely, including how it grows in your environment. Try to mimic nature's models to help control pests and diseases. Help your crops grow in harmony with the local ecosystem. Start small and then scale up as it feels comfortable to you.



Links

Sustainable Boost Website:

<https://www.sustainableboost.com/>

UN FAO Edible Insects Website:

<http://www.fao.org/edible-insects/en/>