

Feature Farmer

Kaua'i Glory Farm
Lihue, Kaua'i



Area under production: 5 acres currently. Expanding onto 8 more acres to allow for increased crop rotation.

How long have you been farming in Hawai'i? Since 2008. We were farming in Kealia from 2008-2018, then we moved to Grove Farm land in Lihue after the big flood in April 2018 destroyed everything we had in Kealia. We also had a second location for several years where we build up really good soil, but the lease ended. We like our new, current location the best.

Crops grown, animals raised, other products/services: We mostly grow a wide range of mixed vegetables including over 20 different crops, and some fruit including papayas and dragon fruit. We are working on expanding our fruit production and plan on having half our land in planted with fruit and the other half for our vegetable rotation. We're not getting any younger, so we are looking to transition to crops that are less physically demanding and easier to care for than intensive vegetable production.

Number of employees and/or family members involved: We manage everything with only the two of us.

Production System Fertility management:

We use both organic and synthetic fertilizers. The vegetables really respond well to the pelletized chicken manure. We also use some agricultural lime because our soil is very acidic. The soil here at our new farm is actually very good it seems because of our location the heavy rains in 2018 brought top soil down from uphill and deposited it here.

Pest Management:

Rotation is important to break the pest cycle since we are constantly planting vegetables. Fruit flies and pickle worms are our biggest pests. We build low tunnels with PVC and fine mesh to cover our zucchini and cucumbers, and we make sure to bury our culls deep into our compost. The row covers are a challenge because they keep pollinators out too, so when we have time James goes through and hand pollinates the zucchini. It is very labor intensive.

Mostly for pest control we use Dipel (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) and neem oil, but very rarely we use stronger sprays for heavy infestations. We find that heavy infestation happens especially during dry springs. Even though organic pest control is very expensive, we try to use organic as much as possible because we are the ones eating our produce the most. We eat it every day! Weeds are also a big challenge, especially in the baby greens and salad mix. The weeds make harvest slow. We do all our weeding by hand, but we can't keep up with them.

Food Safety:

Some customers have asked for GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) certification from us in the past. This will help us reach bigger contracts. We recently attended the Produce Safety Alliance grower training to learn about the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) Produce Safety Rule. The training is the first part of a locally food safety program called the Safe & Stable Kauai Farms Initiative run by CTAHR Cooperative Extension, North Shore Economic Vitality Partnership, and Malama Kauai to support small farms like ours in improving farm food safety and working towards GAP certification.



How have you been impacted by the on-going COVID-19 pandemic?

Since COVID there has been so much work and we are losing a lot of sleep. It has been very difficult since the farmers markets shut down back in the spring. In the past we were doing as many as 8 markets per week! We would wake up at 4am to harvest and wash everything right before the market so it was as fresh as possible. Fresh vegetables taste better and last longer. We transitioned to doing custom home orders and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, including two that were funded by the USDA Farmers-to-Families Food Box Program which

are both ending soon. We are also doing a small CSA once a week distributed through a local jam company. The custom home orders are only about 10% of what our market sales had been. The harvest is also very inefficient since we are only harvesting a few of each thing for the custom orders versus what we normally would for market. Home orders are more work, but there is less waste since we only pick exactly what has been ordered. Our daughter has helped us with setting up a management system on the computer, but it is hard to keep up with managing the different orders and all the farm work. At first we were tracking everything by hand and taking orders by text message. I rarely got to bed before 1am during those days. Sales of custom home orders have been going down now since some markets are reopening. We will probably go back to the markets when there are more customers again, but we may drop some of them permanently. Overall we have been so lucky to get support and funds from many different programs during this time, especially the food box programs.

Pricing:

Since 2008 we have never raised our prices. Some vegetables have even gone down in price since there is more competition now. For example, kale used to be \$3/bunch and now it is only \$2/bunch. It is very difficult because the cost of production and cost of living keep going up.

What does 'sustainability' mean to you?

Sustainability means a way for the farm to continually give good produce while keeping the soil healthy. If we take from it, we need to give some back. This includes both compost and minerals, not just a single input. If you want to grow good food, you need to take care of the basic things. My parents were farmers in north-central China, and I remember they would use green manures like cut grass carried in baskets to the fields. There was no chemical fertilizer, only steer manure from the cattle used for plowing and pig or chicken manure, and human manure too. In the old days we had a good process from experiential knowledge on how to handle the manure safely. We would mix and age it in a pit, dry it, and then carry it to the field. It was a hot composting method where you could see steam coming from the piles, and it was turned 2-3 times before being aged and brought to the field. When I was very little, my job during school breaks was to collect manure, so I liked going to school! My husband and I both studied agriculture at university in China before coming to the US.

**What advice you would give to other aspiring farmers?**

We love farming, not because we can make a lot of money but because we are self-employed and have more freedom. For young farmers, if they like to farm, I suggest starting small. Don't go too big, especially if you don't have experience yet. You can expand quickly if you are a quick learner. If you are growing fewer crops for wholesale, then maybe you can go larger, but it is difficult to handle so many different crops, even for us still sometimes after all these years.

Website: <http://www.kauaigrown.org/kauai-glory-farms>

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