

Featured Farmer: Alex and Mimi Karp Island Harvest Organics, Pāhoa, Hawai'i Island

Area under production: 50 acres

Years farming in Hawai'i: 3½ years

Crops grown, products/services: Certified organic coconuts, sprouted and potted young Samoan and Malaysian coconut trees (which bear their coconuts at a low height), avocados, longons, citrus fruits including lemons, limes, tangelos, and tangerines, breadfruit, tomatoes, heirloom tomatoes, basil, cilantro and other herbs, greens such as kale, collards, and lettuce, eggplant, squash, zucchini, kabocha pumpkins, and various plant starts.

Number of employees and/or family members involved: 4 full time employees, 7 part time workers, and Alex and Mimi.

Production System

Fertility Management: Fertigation using compost teas, worm tea, soluble organic fertilizers, and Korean natural farming inputs. Beds are highly amended when constructed with bokashi, dolomite, greensand, and other beneficial minerals and nutrients.

Pest management: Foliar spraying with organically approved inputs such as neem-based products as required, as well as using fruit fly traps, and keeping greenhouses clean and free of fallen fruit and debris.

Food safety management: We follow good agricultural practices (GAP), maintain a clean processing center and have walk-in cooler to chill product.

Strategies for controlling costs: We have focused on fine-tuning to reduce excess inputs, we are using KNF methods which employ more locally-sourced and more economical inputs, and we are building highly mineralized grow beds that are expected to contribute to fertility over the long term.

Production planning: We are taking note of which specific crops grow best at our farm's elevation and in our particular soil and micro-climate conditions, as well as rotating crops with the seasons, e.g. more appropriate crops during the warmer, drier summer months, vs. other crops better suited for the cooler, more rainy winter season.



What is your marketing strategy?

Pricing: We strive to offer premium quality, very nutritious organic produce, and it is our challenge to be able to offer it to local stores and at the farmer's market at competitive pricing.

Promotion: Mostly word of mouth. We have had a very good response to the products we are offering.

Product characteristics: We respond to customer feedback, and grow novel crops like heirlooms and other gourmet or exotic produce items when possible to see if there is a desire for these items in the market.

Places you sell your products: Health food stores, Maku'u Farmers Market, CSA, and various restaurants.

Approaches to keeping up with market trends: We listen to our customers' comments, experiment with growing new products, and read local articles to keep informed about new trends in locally produced foods in Hawai'i.

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

We anticipate that demand for high quality local produce, particularly locally grown certified organic produce, will increase dramatically, and we may in the future expand into the additional 50 acres of our property.



What does sustainability mean to you and how do you plan to ensure sustainability for your operation? Using local resources as much as possible, being certified organic, which involves the exclusion of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and keeping our carbon footprint as small as possible in the course of producing our food.

Explain how the next generation successfully integrated into the farm, how it happened or didn't happen? We open the farm to young people through the WWOOF program, where people can get first-hand experience with organic farming and learn agriculture-related skills.

Challenges you expect to face in the next 5-10 years: Besides all the current more routine challenges of farming here in Hawai'i, we expect there is a chance that there may be more

challenging economic conditions, social conditions, and perhaps even changing climatic conditions around the world that could have a great impact on the ways that food will be produced and distributed to people worldwide. We strongly feel that it is important for everyone in Hawai'i to encourage the production of more food locally, so that we in Hawai'i could be less dependent on having so much of our food shipped in to us from elsewhere.

New products or services you are planning: Salad greens and mixes, and various possible value-added products from the fruit trees.



HOT TIP from Island Harvest Organics

Get to know the soil conditions and climate conditions in your specific location, to be able to match the best-suited crops to your location and growing conditions, to maximize the chances of growing success.

Mahalo nui loa to Mimi and Alex Karp for this article and photographs.