

Featured Farmers: Paul & Charlie Reppun Waianu Farm, Waiahole, O'ahu

Area under production: approximately 10 acres

Years farming in Hawai'i: 40 years

Crops grown, products/services: Taro is our primary crop and other main crops are sweet corn, sweet potato, breadfruit, coffee and cacao. We produce poi and several value added products from the coffee and cacao. We have begun producing greenhouse grown produce, particularly tomatoes. We also grow a wide range of tropical fruits.

Number of employees and/or family members involved: Both families are actively involved with farm operation. We don't have additional paid employees outside the family, but we do have volunteers.



Production System

Fertility Management: We are certified organic and use NOP compliant fertilizers. We use the rendered fish and meat meal produced on O'ahu as our primary source of nitrogen, and we supplement with limu collected from Kaneohe bay as an additional source of organic matter and potassium. We use mulch when possible to add organic matter. We seldom use green manure crops, but sometimes let the weeds do the work of sequestering carbon and increasing soil fertility. Sometimes we use chicken tractors in the fallow fields and orchards.

Pest management: We use many strategies to manage pests. We don't worry too much about weeds but don't let them get ahead of us either: we use a combination of cultivation, mowing, precision irrigation and shading to control

weeds. We grow 'Moi' as our primary taro variety because it is a hardy and delicious Hawaiian variety, and we use well-adapted varieties of our other crops as well. We rely heavily on our crop diversity to balance pests and seldom use NOP compliant pesticides.

Food Safety: We follow good agricultural practices (GAP) and take a common sense approach to food safety. We participate in on-site inspections by retailers who purchase from us. We have a certified kitchen for our value added products.

Strategies for controlling costs: We live on-farm and grow much of our own food. We also use hydroelectric and solar energy, and are completely off the grid. We use local resources for our fertilizer inputs wherever possible, and use no imported inputs.

What is your marketing strategy?

Pricing: Prices are often set by our markets, but being certified organic and high quality opens some markets.

Promotion: We really don't need to promote our product: word of mouth has been a very effective marketing tool. We attend farmers markets, which raises awareness of our products

Places you sell your products: We sell directly to consumers at our farm, and we sell to Whole Foods and Kokua Market. We attend the City and County Peoples Open Market in Kalihi every Saturday.



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

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

The time will eventually and inevitably come when Hawaii has to feed itself using local resources. We will have to replace fossil fuel energy with more human energy and ingenuity. We need shorter food chains and stronger relationships between con-

sumers and farmers. Anyone producing food is important; there will be many part time farmers and a lot of our food will be grown in backyards. We need to rely on new technologies and new knowledge to accomplish this.

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

We see the strongest motivation for the next generation is that they view farming as an intellectual challenge that can be met by integrating traditional practices with new technology and new knowledge. They see it as an opportunity to use critical thinking to build a food production system that is regenerative.

New products or services you are planning: We plan to expand our value added product line.



HOT TIP from Waianu Farm

Learn the basics of engine and automobile mechanics; it's more important to have mechanic friends than farmer friends.

Mahalo nui loa to Paul and Charlie Repun for this interview.

Photos: T. Radovich.

