

Featured Farmers: Jerry Ornellas Jerry's Farm, Kapa'a Homestead, Kaua'i

Area under production: approximately 12 acres

Years farming in Hawai'i: 40 years

Crops grown: I grow longon as my primary crop. I also grow lychee and breadfruit and have begun preparing areas for both dry and flooded kalo (taro). Bananas used to be my main crop, but now I grow bananas just for home consumption because of banana bunchy top virus (BBTV).

Production System

Fertility Management: I use a combination of conventional and organic management strategies. I use mulch, compost and commercial fertilizers when necessary as indicated by soil tests. I foliar feed with kelp extract and conventional fertilizers when trees are fruiting.

Pest Management: I am fortunate that pest pressure on my trees is not great and I don't spray pesticides; my biggest problem is ants and the insects they bring with them. I have begun utilizing EM (effective microorganism) and that seems to be helping with the ant issue.



Food Safety: I field pack my fruit and follow good agricultural procedures for food safety.

Strategies for controlling costs: One of farming's biggest costs is labor; so, one of my main strategies for controlling costs is to do the work myself. I also compost waste to reduce the need for commercial ferts. I am not on the municipal water system; the ag water is cheaper and I also have a stream running through my property as a water source. Not having to spray for pest reduces costs as well.

With perennial tree crops there is not as much production planning as with vegetables, but we do induce flowering in longon to ensure flowering year-round.



What is your marketing strategy?

Our pricing is based on demand and determined by our vendor at farmers markets, which is the primary venue for our longon. We try to keep production stable in order to stabilize pricing. The product is promoted by word of mouth. I am extremely careful of quality, and don't sell unless quality is premium. Sub-par fruit is given away to friends and family.

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

My kids have not yet indicated an interest in the farm, but I am holding out for my grandkids. In the meantime, I will continue with longon, and have begun to expand into traditional staples. I started planting 'ulu (breadfruit) and am preparing planting areas for kalo, which I will plant in reconstructed lo'i and upland as well. I have noticed an increased interest

in kalo and will grow representative varieties of each of the major groups. I also anticipate an increase in micro-milling of poi and/or shared certified kitchens when growers can go to get their poi ground and bagged under their brand. In the future, I plan to plant 'uala (sweet potato) in the drier areas of the farm. I anticipate one of my biggest challenges is going to be dealing with an uninformed public - people who don't understand agriculture and who have an idealized view of farming and are disappointed with reality, i.e. noise, dust, activity, the use resources, etc. This is not Disneyland, its real life.

What does sustainability mean to you?

We need to be able to produce a large portion of the food we consume locally. We have a great model in traditional Hawaiian agriculture; it's not a matter of "if we can do it", but rather, "can we do it again?" Let's not forget that food dependence on sources outside these islands is a relatively new phenomenon. Self-sufficiency is doable, but diets and lifestyles will need to change. Ultimately these changes will not just be good for health, but also for the environment as it will force us to grow the right crop for the right environment in the right way. We also need to bring the next



generation into agriculture. There appears to be lots of interest now. We need more intensive on-farm training at diverse operations and tap into cultural aspect of traditional systems and crops.

HOT TIPS from Jerry's Farm

- ▶ Don't try to fit a square peg in a round hole! Fit crop selection and management to the land. For example, if you have hilly land -- plant orchard crops. Don't grade the land! Nature has already decided what the best topography is. If you have bottom land next to stream plant kalo; dry areas, plant 'uala. Natural variability is an asset. Utilize topographic diversity. At some point we have to stop growing crops that are not well suited to our environment that requires so much inputs to keep it going.
- ▶ Marketing, Marketing, Marketing. Create demand before planting.
- ▶ All agriculture is local.



Mahalo nui loa to Jerry Ornellas for this interview and photos.