

Featured Farmers: Maya Bewig

Maya's Mangos, Moloa'a, Kaua'i



Area under production: 5 acres

Crops grown, animals raised, other products/services: 140 mango trees of over 20 varieties and some lychee. We also have pet pigs.

Years farming in Hawai'i: 7 years. We had no previous farming background, so we learned by doing as well as talking to other farmers and searching out information online including lots of videos on YouTube. It was a big learning curve, especially for so many different varieties. We have about five trees that are still not identified.

Number of employees and/or family members involved: I run the mango farm and have two other partners—Glenn and Emily—who grow coconuts here. Occasionally friends will also volunteer to help.

Production System

Fertility management:

We keep all the organic matter on the farm and let clippings and leaves stay under the trees. Sometimes we mulched with chipped mango wood. In 7 years, we have not used any outside additions: no fertilizer, compost, lime, or other amendments. The mango trees are very productive and show no signs of any deficiencies, so there has been no reason to add anything. Our lychee trees haven't flowered in the last 2 years, and we are planning to prune them to see if this helps rejuvenate them.

Pest Management:

Mango weevil and fruit flies are our main pests. We practice “impeccable hygiene” and an Integrated Pest Management approach. Dropped fruit goes into a bucket with water for a while to drown any insects, and then we dump the bucket into a pit we dug with our backhoe, which then gets buried. We also have methyl eugenol traps for the male fruit flies. Feeding culls and fallen fruit to our pet pigs also helps with maintaining field sanitation.

Food Safety:

For food safety, we just received a grant from North Shore Economic Vitality Partnership for mango wash and pack house improvements. We all have our food handler's certificate, and are signing up to use the Moloa'a 'Aina Center to start selling cut bagged frozen mango.

Pruning:

We started pruning about two years ago, and our goal is to eventually prune all our trees yearly. We are converting this mature orchard from traditional planting to high density, bringing big trees down through corrective pruning and infill planting with young trees. This will help with ease of picking, canopy management, pruning, reduced fruit loss, easier pest management, and easier management overall. When

I look at the older trees I see there is a little tree inside every big tree. The ones we have been able to prune down have grown back well, especially since they had a good architecture from earlier management.

Irrigation:

There is no irrigation except in our nursery area and where we are establishing new plants.

Other:

We don't always talk about not pushing to maximize production, letting the trees rest. In this regard, it is helpful to have many varieties. It can be a pain for management, but is good insurance if some varieties produce less in certain years. It also helps to stagger the picking, extend our season. We are interested in adding more varieties and other mango species for season extension.

**Strategies for controlling costs:**

The main cost is have to live somewhere else, paying rent on top of the farm mortgage. Our goal is to live where we work if we are able to get a special use permit for farmworker housing.

Marketing Strategy**Places you sell your products:**

We sell our mangoes through the Malama Kaua'i food hub online, as well as their KauKau 4 Keiki summer produce box program. We also sell to some local grocery stores, restaurants, and shave ice stands. Some families also come and buy directly from us at the farm. Every mango season we participate in the Saturday Anaina Hou farmers market in Kilauea and greatly appreciate of their commitment to making sure only local produce and products are sold at the market. We used to sell at other farmers markets nearby and had a fruit stand for a while as well. It was difficult at one of the markets to compete with people reselling Costco mangoes for less money.

Pricing and marketing:

Figuring out pricing for our mangoes was also a big learning curve. We try to base our prices on other local farmers and stay in the same range with them. At the farmers market we charge \$5 per pound and \$4 per pound for kama'aina. Our wholesale price is \$3.50 to \$4.50 per pound. We also have a very popular half price box for our 'number twos.' We found that explicit signage has helped people understand what off grade means.

Our goal is concentrating on quality. Most of our marketing has been through building relationships in person, word of mouth, and having a consistent presence at the market.

Give us an idea of the future of your farm:

We have a lot of unplanted space to add more trees, so in the future we want to increase the amount of mangoes by at least double and maybe grow a small amount of other fruits. I also have a dream project to chronicle people's favorite mango trees from around the island. We could document their stories and propagate the trees to make a repository at the farm. People have such attachments to the mangoes they grew up with, and it would be great to preserve these stories and varieties.



What does “sustainability” mean to you?

The gold standard of sustainability would be sourcing everything we need locally including fuel, and then keeping that rhythm of returning nutrients to the farm as we take them. It would be earning enough income to live here on the island. It'd be really nice to have enough money to give back and support local initiatives we believe in.

What advice you would give to other aspiring farmers?

It is really important to balance out what other people tell you with doing your own research. Lots of people will get in a mindset of "that won't work", but do your own research and try things anyway. I waited too long to get connected with other farmers and organizations. Get connected and get familiar with technology and marketing. Don't sell people mangoes with worms in them—they don't like it. Grow stuff that you like to eat: it's a lot of work, so it should be something you enjoy!

Mahalo nui Maya for this interview!

Get in touch with Maya via email at mayasmangos@gmail.com or check out their Instagram @molooafruitco



@MOLOOAFRUITCO