

“Potential is Not a Perfection”

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Spring is almost here as we move out of the coldest, wettest weather in recent memory. This weather created ideal conditions for the growing of vegetables like carrots, beets, radishes, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, and mustards like pak choy, choy sum, won bok, and kai choy. Even lettuce and leafy crops were loving it. March 21 is the first day of Spring and the weather is still good for growing many of these crop, and also the first chance to sow early summer crops such as tomatoes, eggplants, peppers, and watermelons. In the spring slot, many crops will grow ideally compared to other seasons of the year. Soon, April showers will bring May flowers.

As a farmer, the weather is only GOOD if you take advantage of it. I still remember Philosophy class in college when I first heard this phrase, “Potential is Not a Perfection’ and I didn’t understand it. It actually took years before I realized what it meant, and can explain it this way. We can have all the knowledge and wisdom, but it’s only until we use it or apply it that it becomes something of value or utility. We all have potential, and the goal of this program is to develop your potential, not only as farmers but also a business owners and responsible members of our special community, but if we don’t utilize this knowledge and apply it to our economic benefit, then all is for naught. Coming up with ideas on marketing or developing a new product is great, but if that’s as far as it goes, were just spinning our wheels, burning rubber but not getting traction.

It’s like seeds in the refrigerator. It sits there and doesn’t do anything, but hopefully when you’re ready to plant it, it will germinate, grow, and bear fruit. But that seed is not going to wait for you forever. It also has a useful life, and each day, month, and year, the germination percentage decreases and soon none of the seeds will germinate. I guess we’re just like seeds, full of vigor when we’re fresh, but as we get older our vigor and vitality dwindles and soon we don’t have the energy to do the things that our mind wants us to do. I see this in those who are interested in farming at a late age. They have a clear vision of what they want to do, but their bodies cannot execute because they don’t have the energy, strength, and perseverance they had at a younger age, and they will overestimate their abilities.

If you start farming at a young age, you will have years of experience, and seasons of wisdom under your belt to take your farming to another level of refinement. The demand for fresh, healthy food will always be there. What will come to you as you refine your farming skills, continue to grow and keep an open mind, and become one with your farm is what I call the Zen of Farming. It’s a certain frame of mind, a rhythm with the land and how you do things, and this seventh sense will come to you if you’re ready. You will know almost instinctively what you have to do, and when you have to do it. In Ecclesiasties 3:1 it states *“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven, a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted.”*

A few weeks ago, I met Cory Morimoto, a young local boy from Kona who developed a hot sauce line using Hawaiian chili peppers as his base. Cory is a cordial guy who was willing to share all his information with me. He stated that he grew Hawaiian chilipeppers at his home and at family residences in Kealakehe, Holualoa, and Honaunau. He noted that the chili peppers grown at Honaunau were the hottest. I explained to him that the hotter the weather, the hotter the pepper, but you can also stress them by withholding water to make them hot.

I asked him if he tried any other chili pepper variety, and he said he did, but reached the conclusion that you couldn't beat the Hawaiian chilipepper for taste and sweetness. It wasn't about heat, it was about taste. I knew that, and was impressed that he knew it as well. I also mentioned that the different types of vinegar made a difference, and he couldn't agree more. He used white vinegar in one product, apple vinegar in another, and Japanese rice vinegar in his mildest one. He also had some professional, eye catching labels that could compete with the best in that giant world of hot sauces.

So Cory completed his due diligence. He understood about his raw materials, about processing, and also about plant growth, but his strength was in marketing. Each weekend, he set up a display at KTA Stores in Kailua and Keauhou, Kona promoting his products by passing out free samples of dishes made with his product, including poke, pulled pork with tortilla chips, and chili with rice. If you look at this from a psychological perspective, people will feel guilty eating your samples for free and will try their best to buy something, even if it's the most affordable of his products, his sampler. Although he sold three types of hot sauces in what looked exactly like Tabasco bottles, his biggest seller that day was a three small-bottle sampler of his hot sauce line.

The customer before me bought the last sampler, so Cory was determined to get me one. His pamphlets were wiped out and so were his business cards; it was a good day for him. He got a piece of paper and wrote his name and telephone number on it, and was trying to figure out how to get the sauces to me. I told him I would be back to Kona in a week to teach beginning farmer classes in Honokaa, and would look for his products at KTA Stores. I know Cory will succeed because he has all the attributes of a grower, a value-added product producer, and marketer. He's dotted his "I's" and crossed his "T's"; he knows what he's doing and is focused.

The book, *The Path of Least Resistance*, compares the styles of two great composers, Beethoven and Mozart, two very different musical geniuses. Mozart was endowed with great talent, building upon his already high level of skill to create great music in a few hours. Beethoven, on the other hand, had to work hard at it and persevere, focusing his energies in creating great masterpieces over the period of days and months. He had attention to detail. One involved freeing the mind, while another involved focusing the mind. Which genius are you?

There are many examples of business models out there, but I think the inspiration for our new model is already here on Molokai. For many of us, the future is about the past, and we need to build upon this concept of getting back to basics. We focus on family, on working together, on working our aina, and we know what our strengths are. Molokai was a fat land, Aina Momona, and it will require OUR strength and perseverance to rebuild this food chain. It's about building ABUNDANCE. By doing this, farmers become rich people, Kanaka Waiwai, because of the food they produce. Here, richness takes on a whole different perspective than on other islands, and it's not about the kind of car you drive or house you live in. It's the energy you put into this island, and growing food is one of the basic needs of this economy and of our future.

In closing, congratulations to our Molokai Native Hawaiian Beginning Farmers who are executing their production maps. This is where potential becomes perfection. You are also setting the path for others to follow. For all of the participants, you probably don't realize how many people, both family and friends, you've influenced by your participation in this program and also the enthusiasm and energy you're exuding to others. This is important!! We've been getting calls from others who want to come into the program, but we're going to keep it only to you folks for now because we need to help the rest of you to get started if you want to, and also refine the farming knowledge of everyone. We will have some interesting classes this spring that will take your knowledge to a whole new level. Get ready. If you have any ideas about topics for classes and workshops, please share them with me. Upcoming classes include grading standards, food safety, water rights, and more. Keep seeking out relevant knowledge!