

Feature Farmer

Gabriel Sachter-Smith
Counter Culture Organic Farm
Hale'iwa, Oahu, HI



Area under production: 40 in total, 6 acres currently under production.

How long have you been farming in Hawai'i? I have been farming in some capacity for 12 years, and full time for the past 5 years

Crops grown, animals raised, other products/services: Diversified fruits, veggies and herbs with an increasing focus on bananas. We generally try to have a consistent, year-round supply of basil, beet, bok choy, bulb onion, carrot, chard, cilantro, dill, dry beans, eggplant, garlic chive, green onion, head cabbage, jicama, moringa, purple daikon, thyme, watermelon radish. We also produce some seasonal crops such as dragonfruit, lilikoi, and turmeric. In addition we are a sister business to Farm Link Hawaii, where the farm serves as one of a number of physical drop-off and pick-up points.

Number of employees and/or family members involved: 2 full-time, 4 part time

Production System Fertility management:

Certified Organic, minimum/no-till, local tankage is the backbone of our fertility, supplemented with injectable water soluble OMRI listed products and cover cropping when feasible

Pest Management:

Screenhouses for pest exclusion on certain veggie crops, sanitary planting material management for bananas, beneficial insectary hedgerows

Food Safety:

We have just begun to redesign our wash and pack station to be in accordance with food safety regulations, including sanitation procedures, better signage and better post-harvest lot tracking

How have you been impacted by the on-going COVID-19 pandemic?

The main impact to our farm operation from COVID-19 has been a shift in markets, we used to do a lot of farmers market sales, but we pulled out of those to focus on the farm. We always sold through our sister-business Farm Link Hawaii, which pre-COVID was mostly geared towards restaurants and grocery stores, but is now almost entirely household buyers, so we can still offer the diversity and volume similar to what we offered at the farmers market, but we don't have to leave the farm as much.

What are your strategies for controlling costs?

Joining HIFA for importation of materials and equipment, applying for lots of grants/cost share programs, and selling off assets no longer critical to operation.

Places you sell your products?

Farm Link Hawaii, on-site farm stand, and farmers markets



What does the future hold for your farm?

We are currently expanding banana production into a new 30 acre parcel, and hope to meet the growing demand for specific types of bananas for niche markets. We also hope to be able to offer banana plants to other farmers looking to grow bananas

New products/services Provided?

We are currently hosting our farm stand in conjunction with Farm Link customer pick ups at our farm, which encourages people to buy more as they are already in the right place, time and state of mind to think about grocery shopping.

Pricing:

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What does 'sustainability' mean to you? To mean 'sustainability' really is about being adaptable. There are many different practices that may be variously described as sustainable or non-sustainable, but if you can do something to benefit your farm operation in the immediate or short term, and it aligns with your values, I think it is worth doing even if it's not something you think you could keep up with in the long term, it might not be sustainable in a direct sense. However, I believe those decisions and practices are ok and can be viewed as a part of a larger sustainability effort so long as you remain adaptable and willing to change or pivot your practices to respond to new challenges. If you are able to change crops, or fertilizers, or machinery, or techniques, or staff and still have your land and livelihood at the end of the day, then regardless of your exact practices I believe you would be practicing the core essence sustainability.

**What advice you would give to other aspiring farmers?**

If you want to farm and don't have your own farm, don't rush to get one. Working for others and gaining as much experience as possible before taking on that burden will be your greatest tool. If you went ahead and acquired some land and are starting to farm: In your fields, focus on a few specific crops to the point you can do it well and be known for it, and then expand complexity from there. Outside of your fields, remember that your farm is a landscape which needs maintenance for efficiency, sanity, and weed seed control, so invest in reliable and efficient systems for mowing, and make sure all infrastructure design and layout is mower-friendly.