

## Featured Farmer: Myrone and Carol Murakami Murakami Farm, Kahalu'u, O'ahu

**Area under production:** approximately 10 acres

**Farming experience in Hawai'i:** I grew up on a farm on Hawai'i island (Lapahoehoe). When I graduated from High School I had no intention of returning to farming. I have a BA in American History and did 3 years as session staff in the State House, 4 years as a clerk and as a claims examiner at the Department of Labor Unemployment Division, and some time as a loan interviewer at the Kona Community FCU.

I got tired of pushing paper and when I was offered my wife's family farm in Kahalu'u we decided to make the move in 1981. The kids were young and we figured that we would have a built in labor force for a little while.

**Crops grown, products/services:** My dad had intercropped for years on his farm while the macadamia nuts grew with certain vegetable crops, e.g. tomatoes, cucumbers, watermelon, pole beans, etc.

The Kahalu'u operation was primarily tall apple banana with sweet potatoes that we converted to cucumber and some ti leaves. We converted to dwarf apple banana when it became available and expanded ti leaf production as market demand expanded. We phased out bananas and cucumbers as the viruses came in. We were fortunate as we were tinkering with papayas as a replacement crop at that time and participated in field trials for the Lai'e Gold (Rainbow x X77) that were just starting. We were 1 of 2 trial fields planted and were involved with the chief researcher, Maureen Fitch, and her staff. Our primary crops are now ti leaf and papaya.

**Number of employees and/or family members involved:** My wife Carol, my son Justin and I.

### Production System

**Fertility Management:** We rely primarily on chemical fertilization. We split applications four times during March-November which is when most active growth occurs in our area. We do





this to maximize nutrient use by plants and minimize the potential for nutrient loss by leaching and other means.

**Pest management:** We control weeds primarily using glyphosate and other chemicals as needed. We utilize fungicide for our papaya. We fallow fields for a year in between papaya plantings. To minimize the amount of pesticide applied, we use a mist blower with a diffuser to maximize coverage. We use an electric fence to control pigs.

**Strategies for controlling costs:** The mist blower has reduced our pesticide costs, and we have switched to orchard crops which are less labor and input intensive. We also depend on family labor.

**Production planning:** We put in a papaya field annually. Seedlings are usually started by March, with transplanting in June, and sexing of trees to remove females in September.

## What is your marketing strategy?

**Pricing:** We have a single buyer for each of our crops, and periodically negotiate prices with them.

**Promotion:** We label our papaya with farm name, location and variety name (Lai'e Gold).

**Places you sell your products:** We sell our ti leaves to Keoki's Lulau and our papayas to Don Quijote.

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

The kids have no expressed desire to continue so we will probably sell when we are unable or unwilling to continue.

**What does sustainability mean to you and how do you plan to ensure sustainability for your operation?** I feel that in order to be sustainable, you have to generate a profit, not a killing, but enough to meet your needs. You should also scale your operation appropriately for resources and climate.

**Explain how the next generation successfully integrated into the farm, how it happened or didn't happen?** Our children are not interested in carrying on the farm after we retire. They grew up on the farm and want to do something different.

**Challenges you expect to face in the next**

**5-10 years:** We expect to retire within that time and sell the farm, possibly for housing development.

**New products or services you are planning:**

We are thinking about producing our papaya hybrid seed for sale to other growers.

**HOT TIP from Murakami Farm**

- ▶ Take care family first; don't let the stress of production negatively impact your domestic life.
- ▶ Be flexible; be willing to change as the needs arise.



*Mahalo nui loa to Myrone Murakami for this article and Ted Radovich for photographs.*