

Featured Farmer: William Tubz Kalipi Loko Maika'i Farm, Ho'olehua, Moloka'i

Area under production: approximately 6 acres.

Farming experience in Hawai'i: My family has always produced kalo (taro) for home consumption. I have been farming commercially for 2 years after recently graduating from the Moloka'i Native Hawaiian Beginning Farmer Program.

Crops grown, products/services: I produce kalo, fruit trees and pigs.

Number of employees and/or family members involved: I am the primary labor force on the farm; my wife and son help on weekends.



Production System

Fertility Management: I integrate conventional, organic and Korean Natural Farming (KNF) inputs. I use mulch and KNF to maximize soil biological activity and ensure long term fertility. I inject low levels of fertilizers (urea, calcium nitrate) into the irrigation system to provide for immediate plant needs.

Pest management: My biggest problem is the wind, so I use trees and shrubs as windbreaks. I am fortunate not to have major pest problems at this time.

Strategies for controlling costs: Irrigation is our biggest expense, which is ironic since according to the Hawaiian Homestead Act, I shouldn't have to pay anything. We use drip irrigation, mulch and windbreaks to conserve water. We reuse and recycle materials to reduce costs elsewhere.

Production planning: Kalo is our primary income crop; I plant weekly in order to harvest weekly. I have planted avocado trees as my "retirement" crop.

What is your marketing strategy?

Pricing: I sell exclusively to wholesalers at this point. The buyers set the price. This has not been a problem since the prices exceed our cost of production.

Promotion: I communicate directly with wholesalers.

Places you sell your products: I sell to wholesalers on Maui and O'ahu who then distributes island wide.

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

What does sustainability mean to you and how to you plan to ensure sustainability for your operation? If I can make a living for myself and my family, the farm will be sustainable. A primary way I hope to ensure stable income is to generate sales from short term cash crop (luau leaf) along with mid-term and long-term crops (kalo and avocado).

Explain how the next generation successfully integrated into the farm, how it happened or didn't happen? I have yet to see if my son will take over the farm. I am trying to develop the farm infrastructure to reduce intensity of management to make it easier to take over.

Challenges you expect to face in the next 5-10 years: Building my market will continue to be an important challenge for my business, but the most important challenge for me and other Homesteaders is the cost of water. Act 221 states that water should be free from all charge:

Hawaiian Homesteaders should not have to pay anything for water!

New products or services you are planning: I am transitioning to poi making to add value to the kalo. I am also considering adding some vegetables to my production.

HOT TIP from Loko Maika'i Farm

No scared - fail forward. Go all in: if you go half assed, that's what you get. If you don't plant, you will not harvest. Invest in planning and infrastructure especially wind breaks.

Mahalo nui loa to Tubz and Barbara Kalipi for this interview. Photos: Ted Radovich

