

Featured Farmer: Lorie Obra

Rusty's Hawaiian, Pahala, Hawai'i

Area under production: 12 acres

Years farming in Hawaii: 12 years

Crops: Specialty coffee

Fertility management practices: Through the LIFE ([Local Immigrant Farmer Education](#)) program, various Ka'u coffee farmers had soil-and-tissue analysis of their farms conducted by the University of Hawaii at Mānoa. This helped me determine the type of fertilizer I need.

Pest Management: I have a very slight infestation with the twig borer. Thanks to LIFE, I was able to consult with farm advisers and an entomologist. They advised me to cut off the affected limbs and burn or bury the cuttings.

What does Sustainability mean to you? I've found that the easiest way to a more sustainable life-style is to keep taking small steps that make a difference. For example, I use solar panels to heat my hot water at home. At the farmers markets, I am phasing out styrofoam cups in favor of compostable ones. I rely on the sun instead of mechanical dryers to dry my coffees. And I devote part of my crop to natural-dried and pulp-natural coffees, which require less water in processing.



Lorie Obra stands with her daughter Joan (left) at their coffee farm in the fields above Pahala. (2009)



Lorie Obra of Rusty's Hawaiian Coffee picks her cherries at the farm in Cloud's Rest. (2010, photo by Ralph Gaston)

How did the next generation successfully integrate into the family farm? My daughter and her husband moved to Hawaii from California to give me a hand on the part of the business that needs the most attention: marketing. They moved in March of this year and I already have seen a boost in revenue. They also are starting to learn more about farming and processing.

How do you price your products? I try to take into consideration all aspects of the cost of production, such as the growing, processing, roasting, packaging and shipping of coffee. LIFE conducted workshops with Ka'u coffee farmers to help us determine these costs.

How do you promote your products? Because Rusty's Hawaiian is a tribute to my late husband, Rusty, I'm very picky about what we sell under his name. So we spend a lot of time on research and development, and we enter our coffees in competitions.

Winning awards and high scores in "Coffee Review: The World's Leading Coffee-Buying Guide" is the best way to independently verify the quality of the products we sell. It is also the best way to promote



Lorie Obra roasting her award winning coffee. (2010, photo by Ralph Gaston)

our coffees -- but it isn't easy! For example, it took two years to develop the processing method for our bourbon variety, which won the Hawai'i Coffee Association's statewide cupping competition this year.

Being part of the [Hawai'i Seal of Quality program](#) also helps us promote our products. Customers respond well to the "Seal of Quality" stickers attached to the coffee bags. And we take part in "Seal of Quality" events, such as a product tasting at Whole Foods Market in Honolulu earlier this year.

How do you adapt your production to meet the needs of clients?

Because of our research and development, Rusty's Hawaiian is known for customizing coffees to clients' preferences. With our meticulous processing methods, we can make delicate and sweet coffees, intensely fruit-forward ones, savory coffees with more mouth-feel and ones with bright flavors. All of this is done before the roast -- and without any added flavorings.

In particular, our roaster clients on the mainland help us adapt our production. Their feedback helps us continually refine our processing

methods -- from the harvest of the fresh coffee cherries to the final steps in preparing green (un-roasted) coffee.

Where do you market your products? Through rustyshawaiian.com, we sell both roasted coffee and green coffee worldwide. Locally on the Big Island, our products are at Island Naturals in Hilo and two farmers markets: the Na'alehu Farmers Market on Wednesday and Saturday mornings and the Kino'ole Farmers Market on Saturday mornings. On O'ahu and Maui, our coffee is in Whole Foods Market. And we are blessed to have our coffee served by the cup at a variety of cafes and restaurants on O'ahu, including Alan Wong's restaurants, Beach Bum Cafe, and Morning Glass Coffee + Cafe, to name a few.

How many growers do you work with? As the past president of the Ka'u Coffee Growers Cooperative, I've worked with about 30 of the Ka'u District's coffee farmers.



(From left) Ralph Gaston, Joan Obra, renowned Hawaiian chef Alan Wong, Lorie Obra, and Rusty Obra share a moment at the 2009 Ka'u Coffee Festival.

What does the future look like for your farm? Mother nature can best answer that question, but I'm hoping the outlook is good for my little farm!

HOT TIP from Rusty's Hawaiian: My motto is passion, consistent quality and adaptability. You have to be passionate about your product in order to have great quality. And in farming, you have to be able to adapt to unforeseen situations.



RUSTY'S HAWAIIAN
100% KA'U COFFEE