

## Pualei Farm - Donna and Jason Gamiao

Interview by Jennifer Hawkins and Christine Bradish

### **How long have you been farming? How large(area) is your production operation?**

We have been growing on the homestead (gardening) since they have been on the homestead. In 1999, we started growing commercially. We decided at that point to go year-round, mostly so that our family would have something to eat all the time. Currently we are growing 3000 sq.ft., and we were able to expand in 2020 because we were awarded a MEO Micro Grant.

### **How many years has your current operation been in production?**

2 years.



### **Crops grown, animals raised, and other goods and services?**

We started with things we liked and knew, like eggplant, squash, and kalo. We added in cover crop rotations. Currently the main crop is salad mix (salanova) and asian greens (baby bok choy, 3 varieties), mustard cabbage, and cilantro. We also raise egg-layers for personal and family use.

### **Number of employees and/or family members are involved in your operation?**

Five total people spanning three generations, including Mom, Dad, Donna, Jason, and Puakea Gamiao.

### **What are your production and fertility management practices?**

We use natural farming practices. We are not pursuing organic certification, but our grow area is enclosed and we don't use any chemical pesticides or fertilizers. We make our own compost and have composting worms as well.

### **What are your pest management practices?**

We occasionally use Neem oil, Safer soap, and Bt for bugs, and our grow area is a big screenhouse.

### **What is your process in complying with Food Safety regulations?**

We keep animals out of the production area by using an enclosure. We wash everything, and keep sterility during harvest and production. We would never want anyone to get sick from their



produce. Our post-harvest processing is done in the garage, where everything is sanitized before and after.

**What are your strategies for controlling costs?**

The micro grant helped us a lot to make an investment, and we don't buy things unless we are also selling.

**Where do you sell your products?**

Sustainable Molokai mobile market, direct sales, Kualapuu market.

**How do you promote and keep up with market trends?**

Word-of-mouth. We are a small operation and want to be able to still keep up with demand.

**What does the future hold for your farm?**

The outlook is positive. We know how to grow and what people want. There are challenges with nature and life in general that sometimes make it hard to keep everything in production. Eventually we can retire from our 'real' jobs and become full-time farmers. We love seeing the end product and also eating it.

**Do you plan to expand your products and/or services provided?**

Yes - we want something to complement their lettuces. Thinking microgreens.

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

You gotta love it - it's not easy work. It's physically challenging, and you got to love bending down and getting dirty. You need to understand the challenges of the crops - nature, nutrients, keeping the family (children) excited about it, the fluctuations of the seasons and the crops. You need a good team - whether it is a good team of employees or a family farm. Especially if there are kids involved, you need to make it fun, what is fun for them. There are great resources out there - USDA, NRCS - since we built those relationships those folks keep in touch with us to make sure we are doing well. Getting grants can be difficult, and you must seek out resources to understand the challenge. Don't grow something you don't like growing - otherwise it's not sustainable. If it's too much of a struggle to grow it in your geographic zone, then don't do it, even though people are asking for it. You must understand the limitations of your land.

**Did you attend any CTAHR classes when you were getting started?**

I don't think so, I mainly did whatever was available online through Sustainable Molokai. We learn a lot from YouTube, reading, and talking to our neighbor farmers. We also did the Ohana Garden & Grindz class.

**What is your favorite tool?**

Little pruning shears - can put them in my pocket and walk around with them, they have multiple uses.

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