Well, the summer is over and it looks as if we made it through with only spot poi shortages—congratulations farmers and millers, keep up the coordinative efforts!

In this issue of the *Tattler* we let our imaginations run wild and added another new farmer, miller, and taro chipper to our list of successful imaginary taro businesses. We hope that you enjoy their accomplishments and encourage you to investigate these possibilities for your own business.

Lastly, we hope you enjoy the beautiful product-artwork that was donated to the *Tattler* by Penny Levin.

### BACKTRACKING

Hopefully we saw you at the mechanical taro-planting field day on October 4 at Mauna Kea Agronomics in Hilo. If you missed it (there were press releases sent to all the newspapers), Paul Kierkiewicz and his staff were kind enough to let Extension Agent Dwight Sato and Weed Specialist Joe DeFrank demonstrate their small, yet efficient huli planter. The machine from the Mechanical Transplanter Co. was purchased for less than $3,000 including shipping and can plant upwards of one acre per hour. The local distributor of the machine is Bacon Universal. For more information, call Dwight in Hilo at (959-9155) or Joe on Oahu at (956-8050) and ask where you can see the taro planter video produced by Doug Hamasaki. Thanks to all those who helped make the day a success, especially to the GACC for funding the no-till planting research.

### MARKET REPORT

- The Hawaii Agricultural Statistics Service’s (HASS) recently sent out production surveys to all the taro farmers they could reach. If you have received one and have not had a chance to fill it out, please do so now, as without it, no one will ever know that taro is an important crop to you or the State’s economy. Call them on Oahu at 548-7155 with any questions.
- HASS’s quarterly poi milling report dated August 20, 1991 also notes that the June 1991 milling was almost equal to the 5-year average for June from 1986-1990. That’s good news, as it shows that supply may be finally catching up with demand during those crucial summer sales months.

Word out of Los Angeles is that Hawaii ginger is getting some heavy competition from ginger exported from Thailand and Indonesia. The quality is reported to be better than Fiji ginger and the foreign gingers’ delivery season is overlapping Hawaii’s in part. Why is a newsletter focused on taro discussing ginger? Because many Hilo taro farmers are ginger farmers as well and if the market goes flat for ginger, we may see a glut of Chinese taro on the market. Recommendations: stay in close contact with your ginger and taro buyers and diversify your markets for both here and on the Mainland. Also, work with your buyer to develop newspaper campaigns and offer price discounts on volume. Lastly, increase the level of customer service you provide, but of course you’re already doing this...right?

[Image: NoKaOi’s new Kulolo wrapper featuring creative art work and packaging design. Back panel (not shown) outlines nutritional information as required by the FDA.]
TARO—NOT JUST FOR THE IMU ANYMORE

Taro, in its many varieties, is grown intensely, and enjoyed immensely, by people in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Florida, Hawaii and elsewhere. In 1987 for instance, Africa produced some 8 billion pounds of taro and Asia 3.9 billion. In the same year, Hawaii farmers produced 6.8 million pounds on 430 acres as compared to a multi-million pound crop coming from Florida’s 2,000 acres of taro land. While the varieties and markets may differ, the fact is quite a number of people know about taro and it behoves us to work to increase Hawaii grown taro’s popularity for everyone both here and in our distant markets.

Along those lines, starting October 1, 1991 Chef Alex Raidl of Nick’s Fishmarket in the Waikiki Gateway Hotel (2070 Kalakaua Ave) will be linking up with Star Market to promote Hawaii seafoods and locally produced fruits and vegetables. Local specialties, including taro, will be paired with various wines to create fine dining at home. In-store demonstrations will start October 19th. Recipes and ideas will be available in the seafood, produce and wine departments, as well as at the entrance of all stores. When it comes to using and promoting Hawaii produce, Chef Raidl has been one of several leaders in the Honolulu restaurant community. Dinner at Nick’s often includes taro bread rolls and features taro in sauces, special plates, side dishes, and soups, at least once a week. Thanks Chef Raidl! If you know of restaurants who are serving taro delicacies let us know, we’ll tell everyone about it.

LEILANI’S LU’AU LEAF FARM

Our fictitious super business farmer Max Mahi ‘ai called the other day with some news of a new friend in the taro patch. Her name is Leilani No’ono’o hana Sheraton. They met one day a few months ago while the owner of NoKaOi Poi, Sanderson “Stickey” Poheoheo Jones, was working with Max on that production/purchasing schedule we had in a recent issue of this newsletter. As it turned out, like Max, Leilani knows that she must diversify her crop line and within those lines, her products, in order to reduce her business uncertainty. Max talked her friend into showing us what she’s doing to accomplish that important business goal.

Leilani has had her own taro patch for about 4 years, and late last year she began planting bananas. She operates a roadside stand with a few of her neighbors in order to supplement her taro sales to NoKaOi Poi (we’ll talk about that hui in a later issue of the Tattler). She sells field-fresh taro, processed taro products, bananas, and banana flowers along side of her friends’ Poha jelly, Mango chutney, herbs and white pineapples. To further diversify her market, Leilani contacts the Asian groceries in the state to let them know she has product she would like to sell—of course she does this at least 6 weeks prior to harvest. When asked why she was so willing to provide information to this newsletter, Leilani replied, “in a recent issue of the Tattler you said that information was power, well that’s only a third of the story. Power is really the drive to gather information, the ability to develop skills, and most importantly, the determination to see a project through to completion. With some help from others, I have worked hard to acquire all three abilities. Only individuals with the desire to obtain those skills will have a shot at my market.”

Within her taro product line, Leilani has several varieties including Chinese, Lehua and Zuichi. The Chinese taro goes to area restaurants for dim sum, the Lehua goes to NoKaOi, and the Zuichi stalk (which can be eaten raw) is sold to local sushi houses. She is also planting a patch of Eleele in anticipation of creating a new product. After some extensive market research, she and NoKaOi have decided to bring out a special Christmas-only Eleele poi this year. The idea is similar to fruit cakes and mistletoe which are seen during the holiday season. They realize it will take a lot of marketing to make the idea work, but it will be worth it as they are planning to sell and send some of the poi by Federal Express to homesick Hawaii families on the Mainland for that island touch at Christmas. Plans are to wrap plastic poi bags in smaller, early 1900-style muslin poi bags to increase appeal.

Leilani is not done yet, however. One of the featured products at Leilani’s roadside stand has been fresh, organically grown, baby taro leaves (yes, she is certified with California Certified Organic Farmers. Call them at (408)423-2263 for more information). She has chosen only this size of leaf for her market because her chef customers say they are more tender and cook faster. As you will see, however, it’s not only the lu’au leaf that people come for, it’s also the unique way she packages them. Because she operates on a very small budget, like most of you, she needed to package the leaves modestly. She adapted traditional pu’olu’u lu’au (taro leaf bundles) so they would be easy to handle for market. First the stems of the taro leaf are trimmed completely off, then the taro leaves are washed thoroughly and drip dried. The leaves are then stacked and folded so the leaf points are tucked under, and finally, a strip of banana leaf is wrapped around the leaves to create a neat, tight, bundle (see illustration). A sharp-ended toothpick is threaded through the banana leaf as a bundle fastener. Leilani liked the idea very much because it meant she could use the banana leaves from her farm which she presently uses only in the mulch pile.

Another important reason for using this type of packaging was that it was all natural—nothing to hurt the environment. Leilani is doing her part to see that the world for her daughter, Rachael Kaululani, is a little bit healthier. The last step in the packaging was the attachment...
of an informative label. She used cotton string to tie the heavy-paper label to the fastener. Leilani's green and white tag has a simple eye-catching logo, information on serving, preparing, storing, and nutrition, along with a warm note to her customers (she got that idea from the fruit and vegetable queen, Frieda Caplan). The best information is on the back, however. She included a delicious recipe by Judy Bastyra from Caribbean Cooking, Exeter Books, 1987. She has a stack of recipes she's putting together to share with her customers on future tags. Finally, down in the corner, she put the UPC register code for her product; neither she nor her buyers will have to hassle with price tags. Both the taro leaf and the banana leaf wrapper stay fresh for several days in the cooler, and the leaves and the tag don't get soggy, if care is taken when misting them.

Leilani said she wants to expand her market by getting new customers to eat taro leaves in products, such as in quiches and soups, where they once used spinach. Needless to say, with all the labor invested in her packaging, these bundles command a premium price. And what does she do with the rest of the large taro leaves? She has a pick-your-own day twice a month on the day that coincides with her local People's Market. Leilani said she adopted this latter idea from Big Island taro farmer and all round decent guy, George Kahumoku.

Finally, as Leilani was reading the August issue of HONOLULU magazine, a couple of articles gave her even more ideas for expanding her market. John Heckathorn from HONOLULU magazine took the Galloping Gourmet, Graham Kerr out for a plate lunch where he was introduced to lu'au leaves. The gourmet was impressed with its texture and taste and asked whether taro leaf could be obtained on the Mainland, or whether he would have to find a substitute such as spinach (potential market, anyone?). In the same issue, the Hawaii Prince Hotel in Waikiki and Chef Gary Strehl were serving regional Hawaii and Pacific cuisine using taro and taro leaf in some of the dishes served in their Prince Court dining room, including Taro Ravioli and Taro Leaf Minestrone Soup. Leilani checked with local restaurants in her area to see if they were serving taro or taro leaf, or were perhaps interested in using them. Some were very interested in developing their menu, and she now supplies to several restaurants on a regular basis. Way to go, Leilani!

Meet NoKaOi Poi

In the summer there is often a relative shortage of taro (depending on the Island and brand of poi), but from October through March, there is often a surplus. Instead of NoKaOi and their farmers, including Max and Leilani, losing business because of slow markets, "Stickey" Jones takes advantage of this surplus by selling new products and selling at volume prices. He also co-sponsors local hula festivals and paddling events to get his company name known and to put something back into a community that has supported his family for years. Last week he talked to Ruth Hashisaka, President, Hawaii Food Manufacturers Association (623-6109 on Oahu) about becoming a member and about possibly developing one of the HFMA and DOA sponsored "Buy Hawaii First" ads, for airing during the slow poi season. One of his immediate plans, however, is to make kulolo during
the surplus months every year. He figures that poi is more of a warm weather food, but kulolo can be enjoyed year round, especially during the holidays.

To get their product out and noticed, NoKaOi told their local extension office they would give kulolo making demonstrations at their mill to local women's groups, 4-H clubs, and school children. They also do in-store tasting of their product at supermarkets that carry NoKaOi brand products. With every inquiry they provide a small brochure which describes the history of kulolo, NoKaOi's mill, and all the products they sell. Additionally, they encourage special orders of kulolo for the holidays.

So far they have relied on people tasting the product to keep their sales up. They admit that while kulolo may not be visually appealing to everyone, it tastes great! They've worked with small groups of visitors at their factory and at Leilani's roadside stand in order to develop a taste that is most appealing to the widest consumer base. They are even experimenting with some Mac nuts and dried fruits they've received from interested area farmers. They now feel confident that visitors to luau, where they were once served poi, but now served kulolo, will have a more positive impression of some traditional Hawaiian foods. At the very least, it stopped the MC's from saying nasty things about poi, that's because they like the kulolo so much their mouths are always full!

Another way to expand their market, NoKaOi decided, was to design a better looking, better-sealed package. They are considering log or block shapes in single and larger serving sizes and already have a label designed which works with both shapes. As you can see from the drawing on Page 1 there is a pull tab at the edge of the self-adhesive label for easy opening. "Sticky" realizes the real difficulty in working with kulolo lies in the fact that it is hard to shape once cooked, and it has a short shelf life; thus limiting product development and requiring rapid product turnover. What are you're problems or successes in making, handling and packaging kulolo? We'd like to hear from you at the Tattler, write us.

Finally, "Sticky" is working on one last potential market. He is investigating the possibility of having his kulolo (and poi in certain instances) packed as part of a Hawaii-only product gift pack. He's been talking to Mr. James "Chip" Ono over at Diamond Head Taro Chips (another one of our imaginary friends) about working out a packaging and sales scheme. Their first task was to call a local Hawaii-only product consolidator and talk about this idea. More about this venture in the next Tattler....

**UPDATES**

News from Frieda Caplan's assistant, Bess Petlak, is that Frieda's newsletter on new fruit, vegetable and cooking trends, Club Frieda, has been renamed to, On the Cutting Edge. The price has also changed to $11.95 for 6 issues—still a bargain in our book! Write these folks at OTCE, P.O. Box 58752, Los Angeles, CA 90058 to get your subscription started.