Merrill Toledo, Caucasian-Portuguese, was born June 15, 1936, in Hakalau, the oldest of three children. He went to Hakalau Elementary School (1st to 6th grade), John Ross Intermediate (7th to 9th) and graduated from Laupahoehoe High School in 1954.

After high school he worked for a service station for two years before being employed at the Laupahoehoe Sugar Company as a mule man, truck driver, and temporary supervisor. In 1968 he quit the plantation and began raising taro in Waipio Valley full time. He also started doing independent tractor jobs. At present he is one of the largest taro growers in Waipio and also raises 15-1/2 acres of sugar cane. In about 1975 he founded and became president of the Waipio Taro Growers' Association.

Merrill is an active member of the Honokaa Catholic Church. He and his wife live in Kukuihaele with their three children.
VL: This is an interview with Mr. Merrill Toledo. Today is April 7, 1978. We're at the church in Kukuihaele.

I wanted to ask you first, what you were doing before you started working taro [in approximately 1968].

MT: Well, actually, I was working for Laupahoehoe Sugar Company for 15 years, and I got interested. I married my wife, she's from Kukuihaele. My father-in-law was raising taro. So that's how things started.

VL: What made you decide to go into farming taro?

MT: Plantation pay, that time, was real small. So taro was a business building up by itself, in a sense; prices going up and this and that. So I got interested. Went down there and open some land.

VL: Where did you get the land from?

MT: Bishop Estate. Actually, from my father-in-law. He had the land before. Then, I open all the land up and then prepared it for four to five years before I quit. Was that long. And I had everything set up, then I quit plantation, see.

VL: How many acres did you lease from your father-in-law, then?

MT: From Bishop, 13-1/2 acres. And I have 12 acres from the State, and three acres of my own fee simple land.

VL: When did you get that three acres?


VL: Oh, the three acres is up Kukuihaele?

MT: No, three acres in Waipio Valley, and my house lot is up here.
VL: When you first leased the land, how much did it cost?

MT: The rental didn't change. Still yet $168, plus $66 property tax per year.

VL: For all your acreage?

MT: For 13-1/2 acres from Bishop Estate. From the State, the State land is 12-1/2, 11-1/2 acres; I pay $200, plus property tax. So run up about $235, I guess.

VL: How do you pay Bishop? Is there a representative down here?

MT: Well, Mr. Keb now takes over the rental basis. Actually, everything comes from Honolulu, from First Hawaiian Bank. So, any problems we have, we supposed to see him, in a sense.

VL: He's from where?

MT: He's Waipio Valley. He's staying at the Ti House. He's the caretaker. He and his wife. So, things look pretty favorable. It's hard to say. Rental and stuff, they didn't change, so we kind of fortunate. With the problems we've been having.

VL: Did you need financing to start off?

MT: No, I didn't need nothing. I just---financing, actually to clean the land and stuff, when I was working at the plantation, I used to use my income to buy fuel. The tractor was my father-in-law's, so I had no problem. Everything was free. Only to buy fuel, oil and stuff.

VL: When would you go down there to clear the land?

MT: When I was working at Laupahoehoe Sugar Company, for about three years.

VL: On weekends?

MT: Weekends, whatever spare time I had.

VL: Did you have help at that time?

MT: No. By myself. All by myself.

VL: In cleaning the land, were there patches already there?

MT: That was raw land. All with trees and everything. Monkeypod, guavas, and everything else. All raw land.

VL: How did you make the patches, then?

MT: Well, grub everything out first and start to make the terraces and stuff.
VL: How did you know how to make the terraces?

MT: Well, that's a question which---I'm a tractor operator, see? In trade. So I just saw how the other farmers had theirs done, so I just did it.

VL: How did you decide what size to make the patch?

MT: Well, that depends, see. Actually, I was starting from the top to the bottom, which I shouldn't have; should start from the bottom up. Well, your land is not level, so you have different terrains of how the grade of the land is. So you should start from the bottom up. Then you can make your terraces kind of even. This way, some place you look is kind of deep, some place shallow. That's the problem, see. My banks on the side was done by the Soil Conservation, but the dikes built up in 1966, 1967. About 1967. And I had money from the Soil Conservation. Every year, they pay me $2500 to build the dikes, to Soil Conservation specs, though.

VL: These dikes are where?


VL: This side.

MT: Yeah. The Soil Conservation has the maps, pictures, and all, in Waimea.

VL: How do you build a dike?

MT: Well, that's a good question. I'm not a surveyor, but that's why I say, the Soil Conservation has their own specs which they have to follow, see. Two and a half slope, one foot slope, and how the height of the river, elevation, everything. And I have to go through their specs. Just took me till I make a bank. Actually, it is a road right now.

YY: About the dikes, what function do they serve?

MT: From the river overflowing into my patches. Because I didn't have that before, not way back, before 1967, actually. I was just cleaning the land yet. I had a big flood and went right through the whole land. So then, people told me to build dikes, but I just was kind of stubborn. I figured I didn't see big waters, as of that time. So then I went ahead and build the dikes. I had certain taro growing in there already at that time. But couldn't use, so we dug it all up again and made dikes and everything else.

YY: The Soil Conservation Program, they subsidize you for that?

MT: Right. $2500 a year, that's all you can....I took contract, I took so much a foot.
YY: So they subsidize you, because of what?

MT: Of flooding. They used to come in on a flooding program. I forgot the classification; C-8, I think. There's a class on that, and we can apply for that. And I applied for it, so it passed the Soil Conservation Board and everything else, and I got approval.

YY: And does this have to do anything also with erosion?

MT: Well, at that time, that's part of the trend of it; to stop erosion, to preserve whatever you have.

VL: And since then, has it been successful?

MT: The top section, yes. On the bottom section, I should say, "No." Because the river is not as wide, so whenever get big floods, it hits the bank on the side. So every so often, I have to go in and dig it up and I have troubles. People calling the State, calling the County, [asking] why I'm working the river. So I'm trying to get a grading permit, actually, to go in and restore the bank again, which was lost. I had lawyers and everything out here already. Honestly. Which, other people are squawking because they say I'm diverting the water, which I'm not. I'm just trying to keep my banks in line. Because the gravel goes down and plugs somebody else's, fault is not my fault; that's act of God thing, now. The floods come in and take that material down to someone else's place, and if they don't do nothing about it, well that's their fault. But they trying to put the blame on me, right now. So I'm applying for the permit actually.

VL: So the gravel going down has nothing to do with what you've been doing up here?

MT: No. I know they had some talk about that before, but they can't do nothing. Because act of God thing. I'm not doing it on my own. It's a flooding situation. Which Waipio, actually, I think, if all the farmers maintain their own rivers at their own sections, I think won't get too much of a flooding problem.

VL: How do you mean, "maintain?"

MT: You know, the boundary of the stream now. Get patches running near to the stream. And when you have, so often you have floods, gravel, you have this debris come down and piles up. And if you clean it out to preserve your place, then you have a tendency of keeping the rivers wide open, clearer. And when you have this flooding and everything, it goes right through faster. It doesn't divert or do damage to banks and everything else.

VL: Why do you think it is that the streams are not maintained?

MT: A lot of the farmers, maybe can't afford it, or, I really cannot say. I cannot answer that question.
YY: How much machinery or manpower would it take, in your estimation?

MT: For what?

YY: To maintain the river adequately.

MT: Well, it's hard to say. At present, it's very hard to say. Everything is all closed up, enclosed already. Manpower is out of the question. Manpower maybe only can cut the trees on the sides. But what about that material in the stream. Which is, you know, the gravel is piled up to meet the banks, the original taro patch banks. You know, it's gradually coming up. Some people say the State supposed to own the rivers. I really do not know if they really interested about it.

VL: So what needs to be done is...

MT: Maintain the streams in Waipio Valley.

VL: And that would be to dig out the gravel?

MT: Right. And push it on the side of the regular dikes that people have. So really, that's why I say, it's coming a problem. Corps of Engineers came in sometime back. I wasn't here at that time, yet. They was going put a channel right through the center of the valley, for this erosion problem. But the benefit cost to the Federal Government, they couldn't see putting the money into Waipio Valley. So that's why they have all these kinds of problems.

VL: Since that time, that the Corps of Engineers came in, has the Federal or State, or County come in to do anything?

MT: Well, at the certain point. I'm on the Agriculture Board on the County Committee, and when we had our last flood, way back two or three years ago, the County came in and help us fix our water heads and stuff with County money. Really, I got $3,000. So everything was all really damaged up. People couldn't do with labor, they had to get machinery. I was on Agriculture Board, so I got $3,000 for Agriculture Committee to go in and do it. Till then, well, everything holds pretty good.

VL: You got $3,000 to do your own?

MT: No, no. The entire valley, whoever had a damage problem, brought in their problem. Most of them was on water heads, at that time.

VL: And so you used your tractor to....

MT: Yeah, the County hired me to do the job. People, they figured that just because I have a machine, I'm going to fight for money for me to gain. But it's not the idea. I have my own place, too, which I supposed to maintain. So it's a give and take situation. But people down here, well, actually, the way I look at it, they only look for themselves.
I don't know how other people talk to you folks about it, but that's the way I look at it. We could be a family, as a whole, in Waipio, if everybody cooperated together. We could get better prices, we wouldn't get the problems we have right now. We have to get quantity to get some kind of action from any agency, Federal Government, State. This way, we have only one or two people, we won't get nothing. So actually, Waipio Valley as it stands now, it's really hard to say what's going to become of it.

VL: Why do the farmers have such a difficult time acting as a unit?

MT: Actually, there's a lot of family operation in Waipio Valley. Mostly is all cousins, uncles, and, you know. Maybe they don't want to fight each other, so they kind of stick together. But if they have somebody in their group who represents them, they 100 percent behind them. We had the associations down here, three different associations, till last year. Everything failed. Why? That's the question.

YY: What were the different associations?

MT: Well, you had one trying to operate a poi shop--Araki's poi shop--and you had another one before that, was Harrison Kanekoa folks had one, and we had one, Taro Farmers Association.

VL: Who do you mean, "we?"

MT: The taro farmers of Waipio. We had something like 35 to 40 members at the time when we started it.

YY: How long ago was that?

MT: About three years ago.

YY: That it was formed?

MT: Yeah, about three years ago. And we just faded away, maybe, last year. Didn't run too long.

VL: Who started that?

MT: I started it.

VL: How did you go about getting the members?

MT: Everybody, at that time, was looking for better prices. Prices were really low in the valley, at that time. Was running only about 8 cents a pound, 9 cents. So the initiative we had to give for them to join was we going to fight for the taro price. So they came in, they was willing. But afterwards, you have different agencies, now, controlling these farmers in the valley. We have Honolulu Poi, Kalihi Poi. We have
Kona, you know, and stuff. When the agencies come to the meeting, they was in the meeting themselves, too. Well, we had to invite everybody. We cannot be—the agencies has to know what the problem of the farmers, too, in a sense. So the agencies came in and they said they cannot give this, cannot because freight is high. Some of them, they stuck on it little while, and after, they just gave up. The prices didn't go that fabulous.

**YY:** The agencies, did they actually come from the poi shop, or did they send a representative?

**MT:** No, the representatives in the valley itself. Taro farmers themselves.

**YY:** Were they members of the Association?

**MT:** They were members of the Association. Because they was farming at their own time, too. Agencies plus the farmers.

**VL:** Did you folks have rules?

**MT:** By-laws and stuff? Oh yeah. If you want one of that, I can show 'em to you. I have couple of copies home. [See attached copy of the by-laws.]

**VL:** Yeah. Okay. Where would you folks meet?

**MT:** Up Kukuihaele Social Hall.

**VL:** How often would you meet?

**MT:** About once a month.

**VL:** And at that time, what was it mostly that you talked about?

**MT:** We discussed our problems—the road, water, taro prices, how we can improve quality. You name it, we try to do whatever we can. That's why we have a good road now. We have signs coming up. It takes time, everything takes time. Nothing can be done overnight. It was good in a sense. We had people from the State, from Department of Ag, come down and look over our cattail situation. We stay put money in to kind of control the thing. But the money lapsed. You know, wasn't enough.

**VL:** So what were the actual concrete things that came from the Association?

**MT:** Well, the concrete things was one of them, better taro price, to begin with. Then, we want to fix our roads and to better the community, if we can help in community affairs, we in the community itself, in Kukuihaele. We have no community association and we was kind of part of that, too. We used to go to the Hilo County Council, ask for them to fix our Kukuihaele Social Hall and stuff, which they did. All these new roads coming up right now, we had a say in how they was going divert their waters, instead of coming through the village here and stuff.
It was, in general, for the community itself, not only the taro farmers. Everybody was welcome to join the Association.

YY: Did you have members who were not farmers?

MT: No, not at that time. After that, no one came in. But actually representation was for the community, because everybody was living up here.

VL: The things that actually got done as a result of the Association there was a, you say, cattails?

MT: Cattail was not fully taken care of, but a portion of it was taken care of. We get the road, the new road going down. We get the signs coming up.

VL: What signs are those?

MT: Advisory signs going through the valley now. That's all new signs they put up lately.

YY: About the four-wheel drive?

MT: Right. Within the valley too itself, see. And try to fix the Waipio Valley road. We have the State on the rot situation, came in to help us. The Association was the one who started that too.

VL: And how about in terms---bring up taro prices?

MT: It came up a little bit. Couple of cents, anyway. It came. For everybody. Hawaii had more than Honolulu because freight and everything else. That is understood. But the biggest bulk actually came from Hawaii to get a biggest price. Honolulu get maybe a cent, cent and a half, or two cents. But everybody is not equal. That's the thing. Everybody is different on price, because where you send your taro to.

VL: Why do you think it disbanded?

MT: Well, I hate to say this, but people actually, in Kukuihaele, doesn't like me, and I was the president. To be honest about it. That's the only reason why.

VL: I was going to ask you, when you first went into the valley, how you were received by the old farmers.

MT: Well, everybody like me at that time, because I used to do favors for people and stuff. And I used to work for them with the tractor. At that time, everything was hand labor. My father-in-law had a tractor, so we was doing side jobs to help the farmers build banks, dikes, roads, fixing their taro patches and stuff too, see. So, at that time, we had no problems. Until this past couple of years, then we had the problems came about.
See, people over here is funny. They figure, when you do something, they figure that you going to gain, not them. So, as I say, it's kind of family thing over here, so if they had one of their relatives in there being president or something, then things might be different. They figure that I was running the thing for my benefit, which, in general, was for everybody. Everybody is going to benefit. But they just couldn't see that point at that time. Really hard.

VL: So it just disbanded about a year ago?

MT: Yeah, just about a year.

VL: And since then?

MT: Nothing. No association.

VL: This one with Harrison, what was that?

MT: They was in a cooperative, or something. I really do not know myself too good on it. There was some kind of co-op with taro and stuff. That, I really not too sure. You can ask someone else, they have more information.

VL: When you first started, going back to that time, your water system, how did you put it in, create it?

MT: Above me is Bishop, and we had a spring up there way before. The spring wasn't as good, so I kind of opened the ditch from the main stream to bring it into that stream which the spring was. And that's how I got the water system. That's the only way. I used to have all the water that I wanted. Which erosion now, in a sense, the small ditch that I made about three feet wide is 25 feet wide now. See? Through erosion, see. I took the thing from the main stream of the valley now. There's only one stream in the valley coming down. I took the main source from there.

VL: Can you draw it?

[See diagram]

MT: This is the main stream from the valley on the top. This is the top. And my place is way below here. So here the small stream, actually, small spring in here. This couldn't supply enough water for myself and this other party below here. So I opened a ditch over here to bring it right into this thing here and go down.

VL: And this is the one that was three feet wide?

MT: Yeah. Now, it's 25 feet wide. Because this is the main stream, see. And I had the Soil Conservation build a bank over here too. When we had the high waters and stuff, used to go all overflow into here. So this bank is still here yet, but this thing is 25 feet wide. So now,
TOLEDO'S WATER SYSTEM

MAIN STREAM

UPPER WAIPLO VALLEY

Soil Conservation built this bank to prevent the stream from flowing over this way.

Spring (now dried)

His original 3 ft. ditch has eroded into a 25 ft. ditch.

TOKO'S

FARM'S

DULDULAO'S

Ditch

16" pipe

Center road

TOLEDO'S (13 patches)

tree patch

inlet

Stream flow before
these people water going down here, certain times real little. But they don't want I touch here. So I want to keep this little so much of the water goes down through this main stream. Now, I can't do it.

VL: You cannot do it?

MT: I cannot do it. So I'm going through a permit to get that thing cleared.

VL: So now, this [the three foot ditch] is much wider like this?

MT: Uh huh.

YY: And that, in 10 years time, it grew that much [to 25 feet wide]?

MT: That much.

VL: So sometimes, not much water can go downstream [because it flows instead into the 25 feet wide ditch].

MT: Right, right. When the water gets low, majority of the water comes through here [his 25 feet wide ditch].

YY: Is that a cause of problem for other farmers?

MT: In what sense?

YY: That others who use the main stream.

MT: Yes, and maybe no, in a sense. Because actually, on this area here, this is the Duldulao family below here. This stream used to go on this side here and go down. Now, George Farm is up here. He diverted his water and make this water come in this way. So the water situation trouble is, well, in a sense, it could be from here [Farm] too. Not enough water going to this farm here [Duldulao]. But I want to open this. Roy Toko is over here. But they don't want I touch this because in case they have high waters, they'll eat their bank. So they're kind of safe now. So that's why they don't want me to touch this here. They don't worry about water of this side [the side of their land that is opposite from the side next to the main stream] because they taking water from a different source. So the person worrying about water is right here [Duldulao].

VL: What would you do over here [by Toko's]?

MT: I would just re-take all this material out from here, and keep that at a even rate. That's all the thing I can do. I cannot change the water. That's the main stream.

VL: And how would that affect your....

MT: No problem. It'll get less over here, the water will be less [in the 25 feet ditch]. But still yet, would be enough water to supply the two farms below here.
VL: Are you getting too much right now?

MT: Oh, yes.

VL: What happens when you get too much?

MT: Well, I have side ditches to throw away the excess water so no problem. But now you have farms on this side. When I throw away the excess water, they might damage this side. But that's act of God thing, you cannot help it. So these farmers on this side, you have to take care their banks too now.

VL: Now this here, how are your patches set up?

MT: Well, I have a big 16-inch pipe right here. That's all the water it takes.

VL: So right here you have the 16-inch pipe?

MT: The inlet. Right. Right here. And that's all the water that thing takes; 16 inches, 16-inch pipe. And the rest, it overflows out.

VL: And this feeds all of your patches?

MT: All of my patches.

VL: So how are your patches set up?

MT: All in terraces. From the top to the bottom is all sections. High, low, low, right down to the bottom.

VL: Your top patch has now many inlets?

MT: No, actually, I don't have inlets. Of my entire area, this is the whole area that I have. I had a side ditch going right down, so they have all small paddies here like this, eh. Then you have one other ditch coming over here which supplies everything. Each patch can be dried at any time that I want to, because I'm taking the water from the side of the ditch. And each have a center road coming up, like this here. Which divides the patches.

VL: Have you ever had shortages of water?

MT: No, I never did. So I'm kind of fortunate. When you have these, what they call, heavy rains and stuff, you have lot of water. Some of the farmers, they have an open ditch. Something like this, coming through their patches and this ditch gets full with gravel everytime. So it might take them a day, day and a half, to clear the ditch so their fields don't have water as of certain times. But I have water constantly.

VL: And your ditch doesn't get filled up with gravel?
MT: So far, no. Because it's a stream like, see. Once in a while, I go in with my tractor and kind of clean all that. You know, get shrubs growing over. I just clean out the ditch. But it's very---I did it maybe only one, two times yet, so far.

VL: When you first planted, your first batch of huli was from where?

MT: William Kanekoa. He supplied me with most all of the seed that I got to start with. Which, I was doing tractor work for him in return, or I used to buy the seed and I used to deduct from the tractor expense and everything else.

VL: How much was the seed?

MT: Oh, that, I cannot tell; was by the thousands. By that time, was 2 cents a huli. That's for api. Then I went to Kauai and bought some Kauai seed from Hanalei Valley. I brought in about 20,000 seed, which I paid 3 cents a piece, plus freight. To change over the variety (to Kauai lehua).

VL: Was something wrong with the api?

MT: Actually, take notice in the valley; everybody's raising api. That's white taro. Certain people, like Samoans like white taro because they like to eat the taro by itself. When you come to poi, now, you have to have a color, to me. So I went into the red [lehua]. So if you don't have red, you have that darkish, pinkish, or whatever color you call that. So I went into that. So that's why my place is all with red now.

VL: So many questions coming up. So you started with api, and how much after that did you get the Kauai lehua?

MT: About year and a half afterwards. I started to change the thing over.

VL: The first time, the preparation of the soil, what did you do?

MT: Nothing. I just make the banks, terraces, level the thing off with the tractor, and plant it. No fertilization, no nothing. Just was natural.

YY: Has this always been raw land? Did it used to be cultivated in taro before?

MT: No, no. No taro land. That was way back. Maybe some of the old-timers, they know. That was a racetrack, where I had. And they used to raise pigs and coffee. Something like a coffee farm and stuff.

YY: What kind of a racetrack?
MT: Waipio used to race horses. Regular racetrack. Just was one straight-away, you know. Quarter of a mile or so. They used this for races, way back.

VL: It must have been rich earth from the horses.

MT: Well, maybe at that time, you know.

VL: Then again, your first crop, did you have any customs or rituals that you followed to plant?

MT: Well, I just planted. Just like anybody else. Same way how they do their line and stick and stuff. Which, some of the farmers in the valley usually harvest their taro at 15 to 16 months. So when I started my crops, I usually harvested once a year, every 12 months, till today.

VL: Why is that?

MT: Actually, I couldn't see any difference in waiting another four to six months. You might get a bigger size, but your quality of taro was different, because the maturity of your starch on it. At that maturity age, you lose the content of the starch. When you have something young, the quality is there. The shops can make more money, everything. You might lose on your bags per acre, but that four months difference, you can get another crop growing. So I did everything in 12 months crop. One year. So, they doing it right now, too. Because they have the disease problem, they cannot help it.

VL: Your first crop, how much did you get from it?

MT: Kind of hard to say on figures, because quite some time ago. Before, we used to just fill the bags till it's ears--we call that "ear" on the top where you hold it. I made pretty good, actually. But the poi shop was gaining because we didn't know the weight at that time. We didn't have no scales, see. Then, when I went into the scales, scaling all my taro and stuff, then I took notice how much I was losing. But actually, at that time, as long as you make money, you don't feel it. But at present, right now, every farmer grumbles.

VL: When did you get your scale?

MT: Oh, in 1972.

VL: So for about five years, you weren't scaling?

MT: Yeah, I wasn't scaling. I was just, more or less, the weight was more or less and that's it. And everybody does it today. Majority of them, they don't scale. Why, I don't know. You can get the bathroom scale which goes over 100-something pounds. You should know what you doing. You not fooling nobody, nobody's fooling you.
VL: So how are they paid if they don't weigh it?

MT: They just go by the bags. They get paid by the bags. But the shop will know, more or less. They have scales down there. If it's not enough, they going let you know, don't forget about it. But if it's over, they won't say nothing. That's how they do it. That's one thing, the present right now, things look favorable, but not that good yet.

VL: At present now, how many acres do you have in taro?

MT: Right now, it's only about seven acres, which, I was running about 12, 13 before. Because of the disease and stuff, I just gave up, gave up, gave up. At right now, is only about seven acres. But actually, that's why I say, lucky the price came up, so it doesn't affect too much. You still have your income set, amount of income is almost the same. Even your production drop, but you still have the income, is almost the same. Not too bad. I think it's coming up again. It should be pretty soon.

VL: The price?

MT: I hope so.

YY: What different factors make the prices go up or down?

MT: At present, taro, we have a shortage and we cannot come back for another five or six or seven years, or whatever. It might not come back, for all you know. But the shop needs the taro badly to keep their customers going. So they have a certain volume which they have to go through to make, to keep up with it. Somebody has to pay the difference on the cost. And it's going to be the guys who, the people who buy it. Not us. They drop their poundage on poi and the price is still the same. So the people is paying for it. That's just one of those things.

VL: And so, right now, how many people do you hire to help you?

MT: Everything is on contract basis. I had two people harvest for me and I have one man to kind of maintain the place.

VL: Can you tell me more about their jobs?

MT: The two men that I have, they just harvest. Harvest the taro, put it in the bag. One man just cleans around, maintains, cleans the grass in the paddies and stuff. That's all he does. But he's not really full time. That's only when I need him.

YY: So the two men you have to harvest, how many days a week?

MT: They just harvest, usually, Mondays and Fridays, twice a week. But it's not full eight hours.
YY: What time do you start?

MT: Mondays, we start at 5:30, we get home maybe about 1:00 in the afternoon. This morning, we started about 7:30, we got home about 9:00. And everything is paid on according to $1.75 a bag. Contract.

VL: You were telling us earlier about using the younger hippies to work. Have you ever tried using them?

MT: No I haven't, because they not dependable. I think some of the farmers are using them, which they have problems at certain time. When you have a order to go to a shop, whichever, something like a contract, you have to fulfill it. And with this kind of people, you cannot depend on them because today they might be working, they won't come work three or four days later. Another day, they might be back again. So then you have to go and do it yourself. Make sure you have a schedule. Any manager has a schedule he has to follow. He has his things to do. With these people, you cannot depend on it. Some of them, I don't say all, some of them is pretty good. But not all. I figure 25 percent is good, 75 percent is no good.

VL: And the two men that work for you, how do you feel about them?

MT: Oh, they're 100 percent. You cannot find it, everybody wants them. But they don't want to leave me, in a sense. I don't know why. I treat them right. I take them down every, well, one lives in the valley; I take them down, I help them load their taro, put the taro in the bags, sew the bags for them and all. I stay with them, help them in whatever way I can. When it comes Christmas time, I give them 25 pounds rice every Christmas. So I kind of treat them, you know, they make me, I don't make them. They make me, see? Which I have more time on my own. If I don't have them, I would be down there maybe 12 hours a day, for all you know. So this other way, I have more time, leisure time for my own. Which, lot of the farmers, they mostly do the job by themselves. Sure, they make more money, but Uncle Sam takes more from them, too.

VL: Is there any mechanization in your operation, besides your bulldozing?

MT: Nothing. We had a taro harvester from the University of Hawaii down here, about a year and a half, about two years ago. On an experimental basis. I had it my place. It wasn't feasible, so they took it back. And I just talked to Jeri Ooka, Wednesday. He's from the Experiment Station in Kauai. He was with me almost three-quarters of the day on Wednesday, because, you know, taro disease and stuff. And he was talking about the machine in Kauai again. Got to modify 'em again, it's not good. If the thing comes out, well, the farmers might be lucky, if the mechanical harvester comes through. But actually, according to the today figures, it can harvest 100 bags an hour. But not the way we see. Maybe it doesn't harvest even one bag an hour, with the present situation out here having it rigged up.
VL: What's the problem?

MT: It doesn't harvest the taro in the right way. It cuts all the seed and everything is all messed up.

YY: Is it supposed to make **huli**, too?

MT: That's the thing they working on it yet, too. This present one they have, no, it doesn't. It crush everything. So they have all different angles to look, and so they trying to modify the best way that they can.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

YY: The man who works for you, maintaining your banks, have you ever tried doing it mechanically?

MT: No, it's kind of impossible. We get plenty stone. It's really---if you have all dirt banks, maybe then you can use lawn mowers or some-thing. But this situation, you cannot.

YY: Or inside, say, he also pulls weeds inside the patch?

MT: Yeah, right.

YY: Have you ever tried that mechanically?

MT: No, I haven't. At that point, I don't think it's feasible, because your lines is only two feet wide, and if you going mechanically, you would damage the roots. They have machines for that. They have a machine to kind of till the center of the rows, the grass. But you disturbing the roots, now. Your root system. I saw one work, I didn't like it. I rather go regular labor way. I think it's the best thing. They have, but not feasible. When the time comes, maybe it's a must. I don't know. But until you have labor, I think it's the best way to go. It's not a hard thing to do. Weeds is not full in the lines like the other. My place is not that bad as other people's place.

VL: Why is that?

MT: Well, I have enough water. That's the problem. As long you have enough water to just get your water to cover the dirt,your seed won't germinate, so you won't have too much of a problem with your grass. When you don't have water, then your seed will germinate faster, and you have your grass problem. They have chemicals to put in the water for--pre-emergence and stuff--but the cost factor is too high. Cost too much, so with the labor, well, you can get by with it.
VL: How about using herbicides for the grass?

MT: I use it on the banks. Not in the patches.

VL: And who does the spraying?

MT: I do all the spraying.

YY: How often do you have to do that?

MT: Depend on the weather situation. What kind of water we have. Like my place, usually, I do it, maybe every two months. Like I make a cycle of the whole area. Every two months I give one complete spray. And it hold for about two months. Then I go back and spray. And the cost of herbicide is going up too. It's unreal. Cost you $40 a gallon right now.

YY: For what one?

MT: Paraquat.

VL: And then, how many gallons would you use?

MT: I make about 400 gallons.

VL: You use 400 gallons?

MT: No, I use a gallon to 400 gallons of water. Gallon to 400 gallons of water. I thought you knew, so. I'm sorry.

(Laughter)

VL: No, I'm sorry.

MT: You think I was going $1600? Gee, I would go broke.

VL: And that would do all your patches?

MT: Right.

VL: How much time do you, yourself, spend down in the taro patch?

MT: It varies. As I said, on Mondays, maybe seven or eight hours on Mondays. Then, during Fridays, maybe about two hours. That's 10 hours. Maybe during the week, the other three days, maybe two hours a day. That's 2, 4, 6. So about, the total is 30, 40 hours, not even that, I think.

VL: When you're down there, what are your jobs?

MT: Check my water, check if the seed is growing, the one that I planted is all stand up and it's not lying down and stuff. The rest, talk
story with friends. Everytime I get friends over my place, half of the time, I'm story-ing instead of working, you know. Like you two lovely ladies.

VL: I'm glad that's on tape.

(Laughter)

MT: Oh, on tape. Oh, I wanted that go in there.

VL: What do you look for, when you say you would, "look at your water?"

MT: To see if the grade is enough, you know, the water height. Everything is level and everything.

VL: After you harvest, when do you replant?

MT: Usually, how I do mine is if I have a patch which is ready to plant, the one I'm pulling, that's the one I'm going to make the seed to plant it. Then, after I get this other patch planted and the rest of this other seed, I throw it away. I don't take it for seed. And I just rotate it like that. Usually, I'm planting every month, as far as that go. Every month, yeah. For example, just like April, now. I planted on April, this month, maybe two patches and that's it. Then, next month, I'll plant another patch in May; maybe plant another two patches. Then, the rest of the seed, I throw it away. I keep it in a cycle.

VL: So the same...

MT: Rotation, right. I have the same amount of bags coming out every month as I go, for the whole year long. So I have a steady income.

VL: How long is the patch empty, before you plant again?

MT: It depends. Maybe two weeks, three weeks, all depends. Sometime a month. It varies. Smaller patches I have, maybe I plant two or three a month. To keep up with the quota. If I have 100 bags, 125, 130 bags; I plant accordingly to the amount accordingly that I need for the next month and stuff. And the next cycle comes around.

VL: When the patch is resting, is it wet or dry?

MT: It's wet. That's why I said, if you dry it, you'll get this weed problem. So I always use water. The only time it goes dry is for harvesting. To kill off the roots. And you have a lot of root systems, so usually, I dry it about month and a half, two months. It depends on the weather again. To be easier for the labor to work, see.

VL: Do you have your laborers planting for you?
MT: No, I plant my own. Me and my boy. My wife was doing it with me too, before, but now she's up in bed so it's a difficult situation. Actually, I can do it by myself, but why should I struggle. You have to walk back and forth on each line. When you have two people on one end come together, it's faster. Might take me eight hours, when we can do it in two hours with two people. Who knows? That's why, I go down in the afternoons when I have to plant and stuff.

VL: So you start at one end of the line and your son starts...

MT: Right, on the other end. And we meet in the center. We come to a point.

VL: What is your method of planting now?

MT: I don't know what you mean, "method." I get spacing, in a sense.

VL: Yeah, that's what...

MT: Maybe a foot and a half, foot and a half apart of each seed.

VL: And then, between the rows, how much space?

MT: Around two feet, two and a half feet. Usually, I go 30 inches long. Sometimes 30, sometimes 24, depends. Depend on the time of month, again. Here, there's lots to do, see. You have your winter months, you have to plant little wider. Your summer months, you can plant it narrow because the purpose, you can bring your taro down faster, you have enough sunlight. But in winter months, you have the rainy season, you don't have enough sunlight. You can't bring your stalk down to develop your taro. Everybody is different, see. That's the way I look at it.

YY: Say, you plant one row, and then the next row, how do you plant it?

MT: I have a stick. For example, 24 inches wide. I just move, you know, we poke the stick in the ground, then we measure it full length, then we plant it, we poke it. For example, if I have three seeds here now, planted. This is the row that I finished. The next one, I plant in between like this.

[Extra huli in between rows]

The reason is for the sunlight to hit. You cannot just plant it all in line. Maybe you get a line this way, you get nothing in this way.

And some people, on the ends now, the end of the line, eh. This is the end of the line, they always plant one. [See diagram] Before you
move this line over, they always plant one in the center here, before
the next line starts again. But now, everybody's changing their
style, they follow me now. They take this huli out from here. The
reason is this; when you clean your line, you can come right out to
the bank. If it's other way, you have this seed planted right here
in the center so you cannot throw the grass or anything over up here.
So you eliminate this one in the center. The line is always open
toward your bank. Some of them, take notice of Joe folks and all,
they have one in the center of each spacing. You folks take notice?
Some of them do that. But you get problem when you cleaning your
glass now. When you come to that end, you cannot bring your box,
or whatever you pulling your grass out to the end, you have that stalk
right on the center there. So now they change, they kind of following
my style.

VL: And you learned this from?

MT: My father-in-law. But he had the old way, now. This, what I'm doing
is all my way. That's why I say, everybody is different, how they
plant.

VL: What was his way?

MT: His way is to put this extra stalk in the center. And he used to
fertilize and do everything. And he used to wait 15 to 16 months to
harvest. So I had a patch from him when I just got married. I had
a patch from him. This was Mr. Frazier'a place.

So he tell me, "What you going to plant there?"
"I going plant Waipio Iehua."
He tell me, "You crazy."
I say, "That's all right." Sure, I was crazy. The thing got rotten
because the water was too warm. But I made enough money. When I
harvest that crop, was one year. He had to go another four months
more if he going harvest his. So I gained. I didn't lose. Even
the taro was rotten because the water, at that time, was kind of warm.

YY: What kind of rot was it?

MT: Regular rot. Waipio rot.

YY: The guava seed?

MT: No, the water was too warm. Not the rot that we have now. Different
type of rot.

YY: Was it a soft kind of rot?
MT: Soft rot, yeah. But not that soft rot that we have now. That's the type of seed [variety] that which you plant on an area where it's warm, the water, you get that problem. From before, people have it. That's why they plant it all where the inlets come in, where the water is cold, then they plant that there.

VL: So lehua needs...

MT: Cold water.

VL: And apii?

MT: Apii, it varies. Warm water, cold water, don't make difference. Doesn't affect that.

VL: When was the first time that you used fertilizer?

MT: Just started last year, 1977.

VL: And why did you start?

MT: Not to go let this taro rot. Was a situation, was unreal. I don't know. But I'm not going all full 100 percent fertilization. Only on certain patches where the rot is really bad. That's what I'm using.

YY: This current rot, do you know what it's called?

MT: Pithium.

VL: And you first noticed that in your patches, when?

MT: Way back in 1972, 1973, I think it was.

VL: What kind of losses did you have?

MT: Some patches—well, losses, I didn't know until actually last year when my accountant told me I had to go back and give one figure. Last year, I lost 500 bags only last year. But before, it was worse. Some patches, a 100-bag patches, they get only 10 bags. And people out there today yet. You'd be surprised. So you look, lot of land idle. Even the University. They know about it. We had Al Martinez, Jeri Ooka over here. Oh, you name it, up here. They know the problem. But they ain't doing nothing. That's what I mean, that's why I told Jeri Ooka on Wednesday, "You guys have to do something," I said.

He tell, "Well, you know, this is something new," he said.

I tell, "Not new, for five years."

See, at that time, we had the Association. But at that time, when we started it, it wasn't as bad as what it is right now. I went to
Honolulu to meet the Governor and all. With John Farias and everybody. Now, the new Dean is Bill Furtick, at that time when he just came in. Try to get some money to try and get his research going. He had no money. So I had Warren Ikeda from the Extension Service in Hilo. I talk to him. We call up USDA in Washington, call them up. Because Hiram Fong came out in the---I still have that newspaper clipping in 1972, he had a taro appropriation of $168,000. So we called Washington. "Yes, the money is for taro research." Okay, went, went. Took us about year and a half, I guess. Then, we get the thing going. When we came out to know where the money was, the money was all spent.

VL: On what?

MT: Department heads. We had no money, zero. They never did no research, no nothing on it. Now, Bill Furtick just gave us $25,000 to get this taro research going. Jeri Ooka brought down couple of machines from, brought from the Mainland to take water temperature. I think he told me he spent, was $12,000 already.

VL: So what has been done about the rot by outside people?

MT: Nothing. To me, is nothing.

VL: But what do they come down and do?

MT: Only take culture samples, tissue samples, dirt samples. I took the water samples and sent to Honolulu. That's it. Now Jeri Ooka came here Wednesday, he ain't going to come back for three months again.

VL: What do you think they should be doing?

MT: Well, that's what I wanted before. Let 'em set up one temporary experiment station down here. If they paying four or five guys in Kauai at the regular experiment, send one down; they get apartments right here. They want to take cultures or something, they always can ship it out the next morning or so. Get somebody steady doing it, one guest at one person's place, and from the time you plant it till the time you harvest it, and really know what the situation is. This way, you come and go, come and go; we can tell 'em what is what, but something like you folks, only take notes. But actually, for them to see themselves, it's another thing. So they aren't doing a damned thing.

So I told Jeri Ooka, I caught, about three weeks ago; my wife was in the hospital, this is the third week. Oh yeah, that first week my wife went in was Thursday. So I went to a nightclub Saturday night, Hilo Hawaiian. I caught John Farias in there, him and his wife. Ho, what I told that man, boy. He was kind of embarrassed, but I figure that was my chance, because I couldn't go to Honolulu everytime to see him. I gave 'em the business, right in front his wife. I told him.
Because I met him in Honolulu the last time, when I went to our Young Farmers convention. He stopped me, he tell me, "How's the situation?"

"Ho, the situation is still zero." I told him. But they don't do nothing.

See, as I say, you going have one association, I'm the only one squawking. If you had a group in the back of that, that look like different situation. Which, everybody is suffering. But they not saying "boo" about it. Why? Well, because I can see their point; lot of these guys all ready for retire. They supposed to be retired already, but it just something like a hobby. But how can you get a younger generation into it? You get this old generation out, the taro industry would be a failure, pau. Waipio Valley would be nothing. That's the way I look at it. Not that it's just because I'm young, but I'm going to do something else for my job. I cannot see the future of taro already.

You can take notice how much land is idle. And you cannot expect Bishop [Museum] to come in and help us; because the rental, what they making is small, is not that big for them put the investment back. Which, they have no interest out of the taro industry, anyway. Only by leasing the land.

VL: Earlier, the first time we saw you, you mentioned that they had put in, that the UH had put in an experimental patch with 16 varieties?

MT: Yeah. At my place.

VL: What happened with that?

MT: All a failure. Everything rotted too. Because we was going have variety trial to see what variety resist and would be stronger to this rot. But every one got affected by it. Every one, 16 varieties.

YY: Did you upkeep that patch for them?

MT: Yeah. I maintained it the regular way, how I maintain my own farm. And they come down periodically, check, and how the thing is, and that was all.

We put in some of our fertilizer test and Captan tests in different people's places to the experiment station, University and the---now that came out of our County fund, the Agriculture Department. With the money to buy the fertilizer and chemicals. University had nothing. Only came up with their labor, their men. Which, we had to go spray the thing yet. You know how University people are. But we had to go in there help, you know; help spray the fertilizer and prepare the land and everything else.
VL: Where were these experimental patches?

MT: Different sections. One was in the middle and one was in the bottom. To see what the difference would be on the fertilization and the chemicals and stuff, same thing.

VL: What were the results?

MT: Same. No difference. Still had the rot and everything else. Percentage and everything was still same. Had no difference.

VL: No difference with the fertilizer?

MT: Nothing. And even had the Captan and stuff. The Captan was to take the percentage of the corm of the rot, try to cut it down to half. But they had the same problem.

VL: So why did you start using fertilizer?

MT: I had my own method. I wanted to try to see—I'm working on different type of fertilizer, the reason is this; to see what fertilizer will become effective if the disease hits it. I'm putting zinc, copper, potash and put all different types. Types on different patches to see what the rot would be. And the growth is different again, I can see on different patches. But now I like to see when I harvest it, what the outcome will be.

VL: What do you mean, "the growth is different?"

MT: You growth of your stalk is different with the fertilizing. It gets bigger and everything looks nice. But when you put the taro in the bag, that's another situation again.

VL: Have you harvested that yet?

MT: No, not yet. I was going only with a different type of fertilizer before. Well, I didn't gain anything on it so that's why I'm changing the practice to something else.

VL: And the use of coral, can you tell us about that?

MT: The reason why I put that at the start, now everybody is following, I don't know why. See, before we had to pay for our soil samples, to the Soil Conservation, to sample our soil. So like Waipio is, if you had a taro disease, something was lacking in the soil. What was it, they couldn't tell, University. So I figured, well, I'll take a chance and go ahead put this coral in, because coral has some salt and stuff. That's why I spread it all in the patches. And I had pretty good results, without fertilizer now, that's only coral itself. The patches that I had 100 bag loss, I got five bags. See?

VL: Five more bags?
MT: No. You see, the patch that I had a---where I had, before, a 100 bags, which had a loss, and I had only 10 bags. I had a 90-bag loss. When I put the coral in, I just had a five-bag loss. So I gained 95 bags, in a sense. So if it's doing the trick or not, I cannot say. Now is the next crop growing again. So I didn't put coral this time. But I see coral is still in the ground yet. On this same thing, I going try to put some other different type fertilizer on top of that. It cost money, you know. We doing our own experimenting at our own cost. Which, is not supposed to be. You have the University to do it, not us. But if you go everything through the University, you go broke. When you want to put so much of this, so much of that, so much of this. I can see if that patch has 200 bags and with all this different kind of chemicals and fertilizer, we come up with 300 bags. I can see a good way to look at it. But it doesn't mean anything. You put in cost for nothing.

VL: So what has the University come out recommending, after all their tests?

MT: Only put Captan. That's all they did.

VL: That's what they recommend?

MT: To take our pithium rot count down. That's all.

VL: And have you tried that?

MT: Yes, and I did away with it. I did Captan, still get the rot. I leave the seed one week idle on the bank, I still get the rot. I still select my seed, I still get the rot. What you going to think of? That's why I don't get no hair on my head. I'm going crazy. It's a problem. That's why lot of these farmers are really disgusted or what. I'm disgusted, too.

VL: What else had the UH recommended?

MT: Besides Captan?

VL: Yeah.

MT: Leave your land idle for one year. Now, what I mean idle is dried for one year and till your soil. People done it, they still have the problem. Like, for me, I'm a full time farmer. I cannot afford leave my land idle. I have to get production every month. That's my income. Like lot of these guys, they only part-time, so no problem. You can leave the land idle. But like, for me, I can't. But some of them did it and they still have the problem. The problem still comes back.

VL: Has the UH recommended anything in terms of water?

MT: No. That's the thing they was kind of afraid of. I don't know why. I talked to Jeri, Wednesday again. But see, the UH, according to him,
it says before they can check the water for any kind of, you have to know what we looking for in the water, before they can sample it. Which, we don't know. I don't know myself. But I think has something to do with the water.

You have this guava seed problem coming out now. Which, I never did get it. I'm getting it this year. And what I mean is 30 to 35 percent guava seed, I get. Now, you get that pithium, another 50 percent. What we end up; 80 percent. We only going gain 20 percent? Cannot be done.

VL: You had a theory that the water was not pure.

MT: That's my theory. That's what I'm thinking about. So I want to get something going on it, but Jeri told me he'll contact me later. See, what I wanted to do was, I had a guy from Brewer came out, from Brewer Chemical Company. And I wanted to put blue copper stone, I don't know if you folks kind of familiar of it, that's to purify the water.

YY: Can you explain about that?

MT: Well, it's something to purify the water. Actually, for us farmers to use it, you has to use it as a fertilizer. I don't know why they do that. But this is kind of something just like...what they put in the water now to purify the water, our drinking water?

YY: Chlorine?

MT: Yeah, it's something like that. But we not supposed to use it in a sense of to purify the water. We can use it as a fertilizer; why, I don't know. But even that, I cannot, they said I cannot use it. Hundred pounds cost me $200, so I wanted to put it in my inlet right here. But I cannot. Jeri Ooka's going back to Kauai, he's going to try to see what can be done.

So it has to be something in the water, because everybody has it, has the rot problem. I'm at the top of the valley, way in the top, I get the State land. Nobody is above me. I have the rot. How come? And right below me is Roy Toko, George Farm, everybody gets it. I think is something to do in the water, I don't know. That's only the last thing I can think of. It's not the land; well, certain areas, maybe the land. But like my land is not that, you know, hasn't been in production for so long.

You folks better take a good history of Waipio Valley, because maybe that's the last one you going to take. On taro. Next time you come back, you might take cattail, I guess. That's what's going to take over.

VL: Gee, I have lots more questions.

MT: I get time, no problem. As long as I no smoke all these cigarettes.
YY: Would you like a drink?

MT: I don't mind. My throat kind of dry talking.

VL: Just one quick question. Going back to the flooding, do you think it has any connection with the [Hamakua] ditch system up there?

MT: Really, it's pretty hard to say. Maybe yes, in a sense. Why, is this; because the ditch system has their own intakes at the top of the valley. Which is State property, now. Let me get this thing straight. If you know about it's State property.

All right. Let me start you folks before that. The ditch company built that, I don't know, was way back so many years; 1909 or nineteen-something. Anyway, they taking State water to put into the plantation ditches, which in return, the plantation supposed to pay the State X amount of cents for X number of gallons of water they taking. At present, the State is not collecting even 5 cents from it. The reason why I'm telling you this is because, when we had our water shortage, when Kukuihaele Stream went dry, they pumped water from the irrigation ditch up there. Oh, I think about month and a half. And they charge us the water. So I made a fuss on that. I figure, gee, that's my water, just like the plantation's.

So I went in, I talk to Mrs. Yamamoto, Land Board in Hilo. So I told her, "Let's see the books on Honokaa Sugar paying the State, X number of gallons for X number of dollars."

She said, "I'm sorry, we don't have nothing on record."

So now, coming back to that flooding situation, that's why I say, the intakes that they have at the top of the valley, where they taking the intake through their pumps, when that thing gets plugged, the amount the excess water, that's what's happening to us in Waipio Valley. The overflow comes over.

VL: What do you mean, "when it gets plugged?"

MT: You know, they have something like dams up there. Which have screens which takes the water to the inlets for their pumps. When this thing [screen] get plugged, the thing goes over that dike-like. And comes into the valley. You have that, but actually, we have the water come from the Kohala side now, coming down. Which, the main amount of water is coming from the pumps on the top. It has something to do, I said, right? I think it has. But if they wasn't taking that water to pump into the ditch, well, we would have more water. Everything would come down. We have more flood.

That's why, Mr. [Yoshito] Takamine [State Representative] was talking to me sometime back, which maybe you folks heard about it. They want to build a big dam up here, on the top, to use electricity for Waimea.
And they was telling how would affect us. I said, "It would depend." Well, this is a---they're at thinking stage. But it depends. If you have enough water, maybe would have no problem, as long as when that thing gets dry, we supposed to get enough water to cultivate our fields. I think we going get no problem. Then we would eliminate all this flooding, I think, down here. You know, they would let so much gallons come through to supply the taro fields below. And the rest uses for electricity plant for Waimea. That's what he was thinking about. I think it's good, to control the flooding situation.

VL: Change subjects slightly to marketing now; do you sell taro to two places?

MT: Yeah.

VL: Which ones?

MT: I get Puueo Poi Shop [Hilo] and Ohana Poi in Kona.

VL: And what is the price per bag, these days?

MT: Well, in Hilo---that's confidential now, okay?

VL: Oh. Then don't say it, because it's on tape.

MT: Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry. [MT writes the prices down on paper].

VL: Have you always dealt with Hilo and Kona?

MT: No, Hilo shop, I have a contract with them from when I started my business. And I have a contract to fulfill and I'm still yet with them. The Kona one, I'm just, from the side, just trying to help this guy get his business going. That's about all. Which, I'm not taking from the same areas, now. Don't get me wrong. The lower section goes to Hilo and the top area goes to Kona. The reason is this. The lower area, I have a contract, the top area, I don't have. That's the reason why.

VL: Now, with your contract with Hilo, what is the nature of the contract?

MT: I go on years, so many years contract. I have a contract for eight years again. I renewed my contract for another eight years.

VL: And the contract says that...

MT: If I don't supply him, because of sickness or something, we have everything black and white. The lawyers draw all the papers up and all. If I sell the taro to somebody else, he can sue me. And if I supposed to supply him 50, 60 bags; it's a contract for 40 bags, and if I want to supply him 80 bags, he has to take it. But not anything below 40. So I have a good contract. Vice versa, we can pull suits against each other if we want to, if we don't abide by the contract.
YY: When you first started selling to Puueo, did he come down and look at your patches...

MT: Oh yeah.

YY: ...and pick which ones?

MT: No, no. He took the entire area. This lower section, I have that 13-1/2, he took all that. That's the one I had the contract with.

VL: Was it growing already?

MT: Yeah, all with the apii at that time. See, I made my contract just before I quit the plantation. So when I got out of the plantation, I had something to work with already. I have a guarantee for my family.

VL: Does he go and examine the taro in the patches?

MT: No, no. Nothing. He just looks at the taro when it comes to his shop and stuff. Other than that, he doesn't bother. He cannot tell me how to raise the crop. I'm the farmer, he's just the manufacturer. But the prices vary. As the disease problem arises, he can expect to get something; you know, if you going to pay a good price, you want to get something good. That's how it goes, see. But so far, it's been really fair all these years. I never did get my price cut or anything. So far, so good.

VL: Have you been able to fill the 40?

MT: Well, like right now, everything is slow, so my crop is not coming out the way it's supposed to be. So I'm just giving 25 bags a week. So he understands the problem, he knows the situation. So no problem.

VL: Have you ever tried the Oahu processors?

MT: Well, I used to deal with Ernest Tottori in Honolulu [Honolulu Poi] for a little while. When had surplus and Hilo couldn't take it. Well, that's another agreement that I have with the Hilo shop. Whatever surplus which is kind of full, which he supposed to take mine. And if I can sell it to somebody else, I'll tell Tottori to do it, just to help him out again. I did business with Ernest before, but actually, it's only 10 cents a pound. At that time, 10 cents and 9 cents. Well, it's a 80-pound bag to begin with, but I couldn't see it. Which, the volume for Ernest in Honolulu at--not present but the past--he wanted at least 250 bags a week from Waipio Valley. But now, maybe, I think it's down to only about 100, maybe less than that. With this taro disease and stuff.

VL: If you wanted to deal with Honolulu Poi and you wanted the price to come up, what would you do?
MT: Well, if I was going on that route, I would go direct and see Ernest myself. I wouldn't go through the agency over here--John Loo--see. I would go direct and see what Ernest had to say. But lot of these people go through the agent right here. And he's a farmer, plus he's getting a cut from Honolulu Poi too, to supply the taro to him. So, he cannot go and see Ernest, "Oh, how about giving us, you know, some more, couple of cents more." He can't because he's getting his cut already from him. So he's kind of tight. So I would go direct to Ernest and say what the situation can be. Good enough.

I would advise small farmers--what I talking about small is part-time farmers who run, maybe about 150, 200 bags a year--to go with these small shops, instead of going with these big shops. The reason is this. On a smaller shop, you can get a better price. On these bigger shops, they have a bigger volume. I don't know. It's a bad situation. It's really hard to say how to go about it.

VL: Did you bargain for these prices?

MT: Oh yeah. I had to. And when I bargain, well, this is kind of confidential, between me and him. Some of them, they only getting 15 and 16 cents at the regular prices, Waipio, right now. Some, they getting 14. So prices vary, that's why I said.

VL: Does Puueo have an agent down here?

MT: Well, I don't know. Somebody's talking about there an agent over here, but I really do not know. I cannot say.

VL: You deal directly?

MT: Directly. I have all, everything, directly to him.

VL: Do you do the same with Kona?

MT: Kona, they come over here and pick it up. They come to my house and pick up the taro.

VL: Now, transportation for your taro...

MT: I deliver my own to Hilo. So every Monday, I say I going to Hilo after I pau. Everything is loaded, I'm going direct to Hilo.

VL: What do you save that way?

MT: Well, no. Actually, I have things to do too sometimes. Well, actually, I gain on the hauling. The trucker over here charge the shop 73 cents a bag. So when I haul 25 bags to Hilo, I getting 73 cents plus, plus this now. So it comes out to this price. So it kind of pays the gas and whatever I have to do in Hilo. But I have a little bit more drinking money.
VL: Have there been price fluctuations over the 10 years that you've been farming?

MT: Oh yeah. When I came here, we started at about 8 or 9 cents a pound. At present, actually, to this figure, it's not too bad. Which could go higher, it could come to this already. It has to be this. Maybe, I don't know when, but it has to come to that.

VL: Has it ever gone up and then down again?

MT: Well, that's why I say, no. So far, no. Like the Honolulu price was pretty steady, from 7 cents, went up to 8 cents, went up to 9 cents. Now, I think it's 10 cents or 11 cents a pound. So far, never did go down. That's what I say, cannot go down because we don't have the production. We cannot flood the manufacturers. But if production comes back, well, that is another question. It's really hard to say. But maybe by that time, more people might eat poi. Who knows?

VL: Do you eat poi?

MT: No. Only to luaus, I usually. But not on the table, no. Even taro, I don't care for it. I like to raise it. I don't like to raise it, but the money is there. That's why I raise it. It's a hard situation.

VL: Maintaining your truck, is that costly?

MT: I'm on a lease rental. My truck is leased, but I have to maintain the repairs and stuff, as far as that. That's why, every three years, I change the truck, see. I have a contract; every three years, trade in my truck. You want to know the rental per month, too?

VL: Sure.

MT: $186 a month, for three years, and option to buy after the third year.

VL: What proportion of your income is dependent on the taro?

MT: Well, everything. My whole income is dependent on my taro.

VL: Don't you raise sugar cane, too?

MT: Yeah, but that is side. I don't think about that. That is something like a savings. If I make, I make; if I lose. But my income depends, everything comes from taro. That's my steady income. And cane is not as good as guys think it is, you know. I went to the Mainland three years on the cane money, as far as that go. But that was just fortunate at that time. At present, right now, things doesn't look so good.

VL: For cane?
MT: Sugar price, actually, it doesn't look that good.

VL: Now, on that one, do you have a small cane growers association?

MT: Yeah, we have a association. Hamakua Cane Growers Association. We have that.

VL: Can you compare that with the Taro Growers Association?

MT: That, we stick; that, we real farmers. Everybody sticks together. We growing the same product and we mill it at the same place, so we have the same problems. Like this here [taro], we don't mill it at the same place. This goes all over the place.

END OF SIDE TWO

SIDE THREE [Tape No. 4-19-1-78]

MT: As you was saying, the sugar standpoint, the manufacturer takes 49 percent to manufacture the sugar and we get 51 percent to cultivate our cane. When I talk about cultivation, is preparation, seed planting, fertilizer, harvesting. What I mean is, harvesting, is loaders, cutters liliko machines, liliko tractors, labor. We have to get 51 percent out of that. So it's not as rosy as people think. Actually, at the present cost today, for you to make a few bucks, only make at least $100. If you can make $100 per ton sugar, roughly, per acre, you lucky.

So actually, sugar price at present should be at least; to make as I say, about $100, you got to make about $300 per ton sugar, per acre. Otherwise, you cannot make it. And at present, it's up to $276. On this last crop, I made couple thousand already. But not enough yet, we have the final payment to come in yet. But I don't know, it's pretty hard to say. C. Brewer going into diversifying ag. They going into ginger, Chinese taro, they going into the prawns, they going into hotels, diversified. They have to, they cannot depend on sugar. But sugar has to stay. The reason is this. You have over 9,000 employees in the sugar business, workers. Over 9,000. Everybody figure, tourism is number one, but to keep our economy of our State going, the taxes from sugar is great.

VL: For example, if C. Brewer went into wet land taro farming in a big way, how would that affect you?

MT: I think would affect everybody. Because the situation is, then they might go into their own processing plant. Why they doing that with some of their ginger farm. They have their own processing plant in everything. Well, if they don't go locally, it's all right. If they go in the foreign market, that's good for us. But if they go locally, I think even for them it's not profitable. I don't think so it would
be profitable. Because they have a labor cost which is on a union scale. Then it's a different situation. But it would affect us, I think it would.

I was just talking to Jeri Ooka, Wednesday, as I said. In Kauai, they had a farmer raising Chinese taro for Granny Goose, for the potato chip factory in Honolulu. Now, since Brewer came in, they stop the small farmer from sending. I don't think it's right, but what can you do? So I think eventually, if any big firm come into anything, the small farmer will get hurt. They would, as far as that go.

VL: What is the main problem in raising taro today?

MT: The main problem is the taro disease. That's the biggest problem, taro rot.

VL: Did you ever think of giving it all up?

MT: Well, yes, in a way. But you cannot give something up overnight. I'm thinking about going into the prawn business, slowly. How effective it will be, I really do not know. If something, just as I told you about, that person in Kauai and stuff; Brewer has 300 acres in Kauai. Honokaa Sugar going get 100 acres right by here in Honokaa here someplace. So that's another industry is good to think about it; but main thing is the market. We had couple of guys from the University came out, give us slides and talk to us in Hilo. The market is wide open, they take anything that you have. Everybody can say that, but actually, when the time comes and you start harvesting that thing, that's another question.

But taro should stay. I think taro should stay. But if they don't get this disease problem licked, I don't know. I won't be raising.

VL: Why do you think it should stay?

MT: Well, it's like something like a history for Waipio Valley. That's what I'm trying to say. Because for the Big Island here, even in Honolulu, is very small, taro in Honolulu is very small, but that's Hawaii now. It's something which is, to me, it's historical. It's been there for the past centuries. From grandparents down to their children, from their children down to their other children. It's a generation thing, like. And what else can you raise in Waipio Valley beside taro?

You can go into truck farming, but will it be profitable? Nobody tried it, nobody knows. When you have this flooding situation, truck farming, you can't build any of that kind of operation.

VL: What do you think is the future of taro in Waipio?

MT: Well, the future can be good if they lick this disease problem. It can be real profitable, it's a future to stay. It's to stay. But,
as I say, if they don't get this problem controlled, I don't think it'll be here.

VL: What would you like to see happen to Waipio Valley in the future?


VL: How about the roads?

MT: Well, the road is there, the County's improving it right now, as far as that goes. They going to maintain it, they have to, they know. So they fixing it slowly. They getting it done. Everything, as I say, takes time. But the thing I want, if they want to do anything, get that cattail out of the valley, to begin with. And get the State or whoever can maintain our rivers for us so the farmers won't have too much of a problem.

VL: Would you like to see taro expand?

MT: Well, expand in a way, if you have younger farmers come in, yes I can see that. But with this old generation and stuff, well, I don't think it can expand. It's pretty hard. That's why I said, if this disease problem was licked, lot of these farmers, they're part-time farmers, their children won't go out to work, they would work on their own farms. Would be better income than working outside. That's one thing I can say. Because you your own boss, you do what you want. You work what you want, when you want. This other way, you have to work for somebody eight hours a day. Take all what the people has to say; the person you working for.

VL: Would you like your children to continue taro farming?

MT: Well, I would like to but, as I say, today generation is a generation which you cannot tell them what is what. What to go into, even to go to school or anything. You cannot tell them, "How about taking this?" if they don't like it. They have to like the thing that they doing. Then, they have more initiative to better themselves, I think. Something like my father. He was working for Laupahoehoe Sugar for 45 years. I was a supervisor, he told me to stay. I wasn't satisfied. The reason why is this. The money. Today you have to look where the money is, because everything has a high cost and everything. And the plantation, that's a flat income. You can't go more than what the bracket is already. So you going to stay there for 45 years and what you going to get for retirement? Hardly nothing.

So, he thought I made the wrong move. But afterwards he saw, I was making more than him, he was thinking twice. I don't care. Today, everything is so high, which we have to meet the cost. You know, everything is unreal; prices and everything else.
VL: I forgot about asking you about your side business of bulldozing. You do side work?

MT: I do part-time work for people who want, but it's not like before. Because people, as I say, is giving up farming. They not improving their place, they not doing anything, they just letting the land idle. So, what I'm doing right now is only opening land for people who trying to raise prawns. That's about all.

VL: And how does it work? They contract you?

MT: I work by the hour, I don't take no contract basis. I work by the hour. $50 an hour, flat rate, plus 4 percent state tax. So I really do not know. It's hard to say. How much more the farmers going to go into this prawn business, which some farmers are in that already. We have two started, but now to get the market, that's another question. Well, according to the prawns, that thing can stay there for one year, no problem. It's not like something like taro. As long as you feed it, see. It's a seven-month crop. You can start harvesting from seven months. But that's a thing, that you can wait. It's not a rush thing that you have to harvest it at a certain time. I think it might be all right. If you have money which you depend on, you have money on the side in case things go sour, you still can make in time to come. As long as you have your water, that thing will be no problem.

Anything else? You always can ask later if you forgot something.

VL: Did you ever think of leaving this area?

MT: Well, not right now at present. If things get bad, well, I might. Might. Where I might go, where I will go, I really do not know. Well, my age is creeping up, that's the thing I'm worried about. When you get at 50, nobody wants to hire a old person already, see. That's the thing I'm kind of worried thinking about. As I say, I'm a tractor operator, truck operator, I'm a mechanic, I'm a welder, I do all around, so I think I can get a job someplace, if I have to....I hope.

END OF INTERVIEW
ARTICLE I. NAME
The name of the corporation shall be TARO FARMERS OF WAIPIO.

ARTICLE II. LOCATION
The location of its principal office shall be in the Hamakua District. The principal address of the association shall be that of the president in office during the fiscal year.

ARTICLE III. OBJECTIVES
The objectives of this association are:
1. To increase public awareness of the culture and heritage of Waipio Valley.
2. To increase community unity among the people in and around the vicinity of Waipio.
3. To establish a working force to prevent the abuse of the valley.
4. To help the farmers cultivate and produce crops more efficiently and profitably.
5. To further the price and quality of taro.
6. To foster good fellowship among its members and to participate in the general welfare and betterment of the association and the community.

ARTICLE IV. MEMBERS
Section 1. Qualification
Active: Any independent taro farmer who cultivates taro in Waipio Valley, Hamakua District and pays a membership due.
Associate: Any individual interested in promotion of the objectives of the association and is willing to pay membership dues as determined by the association.

Section 2. Membership Roll
A roll of members shall be kept by the secretary and such roll shall be the official list of the membership of the association.

ARTICLE V. OFFICERS
The affairs of the association shall be managed by the Board of Directors.
The Board of Directors shall consist of seven members: President; First Vice President; Second Vice President; Secretary; Treasurer; and two members voted at-large from among the membership.
Terms: Each officer shall serve for a term of two years and shall continue to serve beyond the expiration date of his term until a successor is named and assumed duties.
Duties:
A. The president shall preside at all business meetings of the association and of the Board. He shall appoint standing and special committees and their chairmen. He shall serve as ex-officio on all committees except
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the nominating committee. He shall make a report at the annual meeting of the members concerning the activities of the organization for the past year. He shall sign together with the secretary all legal papers of the association authorized by the Board.

B. The first vice president shall assist the president whenever requested by the president and shall have all the powers and perform all the duties of the president in the absence or inability to act of the president.

C. The second vice president shall assist the president and first vice president whenever requested by same and have all powers and perform all the duties of the president and first vice president in the absence or inability to act of the president and first vice president.

D. The secretary shall keep and have custody of the minutes of all the business meeting of the association and the board of directors and shall attest the same with his signature. He shall notify all officers of their election and all committees of their appointment. He shall notify all members personally or by mail addressed to their last recorded residence or business address of all general membership meetings in conformity with the by-laws.

E. The treasurer shall receive, disburse, and have care of all funds of the association subject to such regulations as may be directed by the Board. He shall make a report to the Board whenever so requested and to the members at the annual meetings and at such other times as required by the Board. He shall keep correct books of accounts of all receipts and expenditures of the association.

Quorum and Vote: A majority of the Board members constitutes a quorum at any Board meeting. An affirmative vote not less than the majority of the Board members present shall be necessary for valid action by the Board. Each director shall have one vote.

Meetings: The Board shall hold quarterly meetings or when called by the president or a majority of the directors. Notice of any Board meeting shall be given by the secretary to each director personally or by mail addressed to his last recorded residence or business address at least five (5) days before the meeting.

General membership meetings will be called by the president.

Vacancies: If any vacancy occurs on the Board, the president shall appoint a member from the membership to fill such vacancy. Any person so appointed shall serve on a temporary basis until approved by the Board of Directors.

ARTICLE VI. ELECTIONS

All officers and directors shall be elected by the members at the annual membership meeting. Nominations shall be made by a nominating committee of at least three members appointed by the president one month prior to the election of the officers. No member of the nominating committee shall be eligible to any office by action of the nominating committee. The president shall designate the chairman of the committee. The nominating committee shall report at the election meeting the name of at least one candidate for
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each office to be filled. The consent of each candidate must be obtained before his name is placed in nomination. Additional nominations may be made from the floor.

ARTICLE VII. RULES OF ORDER

The rules contained in Robert's Rules of Order, Revised, shall govern the conduct of meetings of the membership and directors.

ARTICLE VIII. COMMITTEES

The president shall appoint a chairperson to each of the following committees: Road, Water, By-laws, Finance, and all other committees as deemed necessary.

ARTICLE IX. FISCAL YEAR

The fiscal year of the association shall begin on the first day of January and continue to the 31st day of December.

ARTICLE X. AMENDMENTS

These by-laws may be amended by a majority vote of the membership present at the annual meeting of the association or at any special meeting called for that purpose provided notice of the proposed amendment be made available to the membership ten (10) days prior to the meeting. Voting by proxy is permitted.

Adoption of By-Laws: A meeting of the members of the Taro Farmers of Waipio was duly called for the purpose of considering the adoption of the foregoing provisions as the by-laws of said association and was held at ______________, Hawaii on ______________ day of ______________. There, at said meeting the foregoing by-laws were adopted by a majority of the members voting thereon.

____________________________________
President

____________________________________
Secretary
WAIPÍ’O: MĀNO WAI

AN ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

Volume II

ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

ETHNIC STUDIES PROGRAM
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI, MANOA

December 1978