It's been a little while since we last visited, and there is much to talk about. One big item to report is that with the help of various people, the Taro Project has developed an Air Shipped taro sticker to go on our yellow bag tags.

Once this sticker is placed on the tag it will allow for product differentiation at the wholesale market: air flown vs boat shipped taro. A small quantity of the stickers has been given to export-taro shippers along with the name of the company that produced them (J&D International, Inc, 536-5469). Remember mislabeling boat-shipped taro with these stickers is unlawful as they are misrepresenting the product's quality.

Also informational cards on Chinese taro will be handed out at worldwide conventions. The card has information about our fine product, along with a picture of our trade mark yellow label and the names of the Hawaii taro shippers who were listed in the 1991 Agricultural Export Directory. Thanks to the DOA and the DBED for their help in getting our product noticed.

As the market for Chinese taro on the mainland becomes more mature and competitive, Hawaii growers are going to have to make some tough decisions. To give you an example of such a decision, here's a problem that should concern us all. In the last few months, one LA shipper who buys taro from Hawaii (not our friend James Lee), has been receiving Chinese taro in a bag printed with "HAWAII brand taro" in big bold 4" letters. The only problem is that the taro is from a foreign country! The bag has the country of origin on it, printed inconspicuously on the seam and in very tiny letters, so it’s not quite illegal just unethical. The point is Hawaii taro farmers, with the exception of a few, still ship taro to LA in bags which do little to promote repeat buying of their fine product. So what do you want to do...put ads in the LA Chinese language newspapers? Call us at the Tattler we have some ideas.

On a related matter is the issue of grading Chinese taro. While we’ve heard farmers both pro and con on the issue, let us remind you that QUALITY standards offer these advantages:
1) Allow for more meaningful price quotations since there is a more direct relationship of price to quality.
2) Make possible the sale of goods by sample or description. If the standards are well understood and properly utilized, products can be bought and sold sight unseen.
3) Allow consolidation of products for shipment to reduce transportation and handling costs.
4) May increase consumer demand based on greater consumer confidence in the product due to quality consistency.
5) Contribute to faster and more satisfactory settlement of loss and damage claims.
6) Permit consumers to communicate their preferences back to the producers.

If you would like to get the ball rolling on grading please call Sam Camp at the DOA at 548-7145.

Upcoming Events

Windward Community College Annual Taro Festival
Saturday, August 10, 1991. This is the third year this informational and cultural event has taken place and every year it seems to get better. This fun filled day starts at 9 am and finishes at 2 pm on WCC's campus near the intersections of the LikeLike and Kahekeli Hwys. in Kaneohe, Oahu. Call WCC at 235-7433 for more information.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT—NOW!

As the market for Chinese taro on the mainland becomes more mature and competitive, Hawaii growers are going to have to make some tough decisions. To give you an example of such a decision, here's a problem that should concern us all. In the last few months, one LA shipper who buys taro from Hawaii (not our friend James Lee), has been receiving Chinese taro in a bag printed with "HAWAII brand taro" in big bold 4" letters. The only problem is that the taro is from a foreign country! The bag has the country of origin on it, printed inconspicuously on the seam and in very tiny letters, so it's not quite illegal just unethical. The point is Hawaii taro farmers, with the exception of a few, still ship taro to LA in bags which do little to promote repeat buying of their fine product. So what do you want to do...put ads in the LA Chinese language newspapers? Call us at the Tattler we have some ideas.

F.Y.I the Department of Agriculture's Measurement Standards Division is attempting to deal with this taro bag labeling problem along with the labeling problems of Maui onions and Kona coffee.

A while ago we introduced you to Max, a very enterprising (yet fictitious) taro farmer. Two of her strongest business qualities are long-range production and sales planning, and QUALITY service. She is also always on the lookout for ways to diversify her product line. About 4 months ago she found the following article, and along with a potter friend of hers, has
come up with a very unique taro house plant and planter product which is selling like crazy at the craft fairs. She’s even made little tags to hang around the planter to explain the importance of taro in Hawaii and how to care for this unique plant. She shared the article that got her little side business going with us:

“In the South Pacific, where taro tubers are a staple crop, the quilted, satiny green leaves attain a height and spread of five feet, earning them the nickname “elephant ears.” When the plant is grown indoors in a good-size pot, its leaves become only half that size but are still quite attractive.

The banded tubers of the taro (Colocasia esculenta) can be found year round in Latin and Oriental markets. They are dull brown in color and roughly spherical in shape. Small pink buds should be visible within the bands.

A reliable way to spout a tuber is in a clear, self-sealing plastic bag filled with unmilled sphagnum moss. The moss should be only slightly damp (squeeze out any excess moisture) or the tuber may rot. After completely surrounding the tuber with moss, seal the bag and provide it with bottom heat. Check the moss for dryness every couple of days during the one to four weeks it takes for sprouts to appear.

Move the tuber to a pot when the roots are a few inches long, setting it just below the surface of the soil mix. As a precaution against over-watering, choose a container whose diameter is only about an inch greater than that of the tuber. Keep the soil evenly moist, and after about six weeks begin feeding monthly.

Like many other members of the aroid family, taro flourishes without much direct sun and prefers higher than average humidity. One way to increase humidity is by double potting. Set the plant’s container inside a slightly larger pot, filling the space in between with moist sphagnum or peat moss.

Taro goes dormant in winter if grown in a cool setting, as indicated by withering foliage in late autumn. A plant set in a warm location during winter can be kept green for an entire year, but it will lose vigor the following year. It is better to force the tuber into dormancy by gradually withholding water until the foliage shrivels completely. Store the leafless tuber in its pot for about two months, keeping the soil barely moist. After two months resume regular watering and fertilizing to spur new growth.

Similar to taro but diminutive enough to be grown on a windowsill is malanga (Xanthosoma sagittifolium), also known as yautia. The yam-like tuber, sold in Latin markets, produces a gigantic plant when field-grown, but in a flowerpot it grows to a compact cluster of showy leaves that seldom exceeds about a foot in height. Foliage is arrow-shaped and mossy green with contrasting pale veins. Treat malanga tubers and plants as you would taro, taking special care to provide high humidity. Be sure after potting up a sprouted tuber to slip a clear plastic bag over the container until the first leaves appear.” (From Horticulture, Vol 67, No. 11, November 1989)

HELPFUL HINTS
A Possible Antidote for the Itches
As stressed in an earlier issue of the Tattler, people packaging and selling luau leaves provide very little information to the consumer about how to prepare them, and without it you may have a hard time attracting new customers. If you need help with this contact us! Another area that is neglected when selling raw luau leaves, especially to your new customers, is why you need to cook the leaves, and if you do get itchy in the cooking process, how to spell relief.

Taro itching is a problem for both growers and consumers. Farmers usually get itchy when harvesting taro roots or leaves on damp or rainy days. Also, weeding during this type of weather condition may also get you itchy. Consumers often are affected when peeling wet taro skin off corms which they are about to cook.

In the community-minded spirit of our newsletter, long time taro leaf growers and good business persons, Clifford and Li Wong of Wong’s Taro Leaf Farm in Kaneohe, offer just one possible antidote for the itchiness that may work for you, your workers and your uninformed customers.

Remedy for External Itching: If your skin gets itchy from handling taro use some table salt to relieve the irritation. Wash the itchy area first with cold water. Then apply enough salt to cover the area and rub it in thoroughly with a little cold water. Rinse off. Do this 3 or 4 times and if the itching remains, repeat the remedy. This time, however, let the salt stay on the skin for 3 to 5 minutes before rinsing completely.

Remedy for Internal Itching: Consuming taro or taro leaves that have not been properly cooked can cause internal itching—mostly in the mouth area. One way to relive this irritation is to sprinkle some salt into the mouth and then to cough-out the salt/saliva mixture. Then sprinkle a little more salt into the mouth and swallow it. (You should then re-cook your taro and leaves a little longer.)

Should this salt remedy fail to relieve the itching call your local Poison Control Center immediately!

Consumers: peel the taro when it is dry. Cut corms into small pieces and place in a colander a little at a time. Run each batch under cold water while shaking—avoid using your bare hands. Now you are ready to cook.

ON THE BOOKSHELF and HARD-DISK
QuickPay is added to Quicken. A while back we introduced you to Quicken a computer based software package which greatly reduces bookkeeping headaches. Well, now there is a QuickPay add-on package which automatically calculates and keeps track of all your employees wages and deductions. See your local software dealer or call Intuit at 1-800-432-6935 for this $30 wonder.

The 1991 Pesticide Directory, by Lori Thomson Harvey and W.T. Thomson. This annual is for those who wish to know just about everything about the US pesticide industry including: manufacturers; formulations; key personnel, and other pertinent information. The book is $75 plus tax from Thomson Publications, P.O. Box 9935, Fresno, CA 93791 or call (209) 435-2163 or FAX (209) 435-8319.

Slugs and Snails, by Julian Yates. This Urban Pest Press newsletter may offer some relief to those farmers who have been inundated with these slinky pests.
in the past. Call the Department of Entomology at UH at 956-7076 and ask for this 1988 one page document.

Chinese or Fuller Rose Beetle, by David Marsden. Another helpful bulletin from the UH Cooperative Extension Service, this brochure may help you keep these pests at bay. Call your local extension office and ask for Bulletin No. 10.

Healthy Harvest III: A Directory of Sustainable Agriculture and Horticulture Organizations. This 160 page book puts you in contact with organizations involved in organic and other types of natural farming. Send $16.95 plus $2 postage to Potomac Valley Press, 1424 16th St. NW #105, Washington, D.C. 20036; (202) 462-8800.

Also you may want to check out these mail order houses for organic and resource-efficient farming supplies:

Gardener's Supply Company. "America's number 1 source of innovative gardening products". Chemical-free pest control supplies, composting equipment, irrigation materials, etc. Write 128 Intervale Road, Burlington, VT 05401; (802) 863-1700.

Garden's Alive! Safe pest control, organic fertilizers, etc. Natural Gardening Research Center, Highway 48, P.O. Box 149, Sunman, IN 47041; (812) 623-3800.

The Necessary Catalog. State-of-the-art organic supplies for the farmer or large-scale gardener. P.O. Box 305, New Castle, VA 24127; (800) 447-5354.

Planetary Solutions, Drip irrigation catalog with complete instructions on how to install a system. Send $1 to P.O. Box 1049, Boulder, CO 80306-1049, or call 1-800-488-2088.

The Urban Farmer Store. Agricultural scale drip irrigation supplies at bulk prices. Send $1 to 2833 Vincente Street, San Francisco, CA 94116-2721.

Sources and Resources

The Pacific Business Center Program Offers Help

Located in the Business School at UH Manoa is the small federally funded organization, the Pacific Business Center Program (PBCP). This program's goal is to provide technical and managerial assistance to businesses in the Pacific, including Hawaii, by matching-up clients with interested specialists. An example of such a project would be if you wanted to grow taro hydroponically (we don't suggest it) and you need a production and economic assessment done for a bank loan. PBCP would try to locate someone with the technical skill to advise you with this venture. While the organization's match-making service is free, the assistance of the outside specialists is reasonably priced. If this service sounds good to you give the PBCP's director, Angela Williams, a call at 956-6286.

Agricultural Soil Conservation Service (ASCS) Wants to Help You Help Yourself

Are you tired of seeing your soil pour into irrigation ditches? Or, would you like your paddy water to be slightly cooler as it passes from one lo'i to another? Well ASCS may be the folks you've been looking for. Through the Agricultural Conservation Program, ASCS helps farmers like yourself solve conservation and environmental problems. Their brochure says, "Cost-share payments reimburse a producer for a percentage of the cost of performing a practice and are provided as incentives to do conservation work. This reimbursement is not a loan and no repayment is required as long as you use and maintain the practice throughout its life-span (usually 5-10 years)." If this sounds like a way you can improve your farm call Henry Fong on Oahu at 541-2643 or look in the US Government section of your phone book for your local ASCS office. Thanks to Karol Haraguchi of Hanalei for the tip.

Office of Hawaiian Affairs and Alu Like

Are you a Native Hawaiian and are trying to expand your business and need a loan (sorry, farms do not qualify at this time)? Well you may want to contact OHA about their revolving loan opportunities. Contact that office on Oahu at 548-3777 and ask for Ken Sato.

Also, if you are Native Hawaiian and want to get your business listed in the OHA and Alu Like sponsored Native Hawaiian Business directory, call the Alu Like's business office on Oahu at 524-1225... hurry time is running out.

Department of Agriculture

Every year the Marketing Division of the DOA puts out two export marketing directories, one for agricultural products—fresh and processed, and for the floral industry. These directories are mailed around the world and are given out at trade shows —they increase the business of people who are listed in them. If this sounds good to you call the Marketing Division at 548-4250 and ask how you can be listed in 1992 directories.

Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics-UH Manoa

With the same federal funds which have brought you the Taro Project and this newsletter, AREC researchers and their colleagues have also developed a variety of Economic Fact Sheets on numerous crops. They include: taro, coffee, lychee, cocoa, shrimp, banana, pepper, cashew, tea, papaya, and macadamia nut, among others. Call CTAHR's publication office at 956-3176 for reprints of these fine publications.

United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association (UFFVA)

Along the same lines as the above mentioned fact sheets, the UFFVA has produced a group of fact sheets which contain information on produce production, history, retailing, grades and standards and the like. These sheets cover: bean sprouts, bell peppers, cabbage, endive & escarole, eggplant, ginger root, leeks, parsley, shallots,
bananas, blackberries, cherimoyas, oranges, papayas, peaches and plantains. Unlike the former group these sheets are not free, the whole set plus binder is $90 to non-member, but they may be well worth the price. Call UFFVA in Virginia at (703) 836-3410 for more info.

**Club Frieda Newsletter**

Now, from the folks that introduced the Kiwi fruit to the US, comes their latest newsletter for those on the cutting edge of exotic foods, such as taro. The subscription for this newsletter which is published 6 times a year sells for $6 and can be purchased by writing Frieda’s Finest, P.O. Box 58488, Los Angeles, CA 90058. Hey, if you don’t know what people are buying how can you plan to diversity and stay financially healthy?

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**CHEMICALLY SPEAKING**

**The Pesticide Label Reports on Continuing Research**

CTAHR’s The Pesticide Label newsletter of December 1990 reports on work at UH’s Pesticide Registration Program. The Program is currently field testing the following chemicals for use on taro:

1) Chlorpyrifos, dimethoate, and Safer soap insecticides to control taro root aphid on dryland taro.
2) Metalaxyl fungicide to control pythium and phytophthora on wet and dryland taro.

**NOTE:** These trials are being conducted primarily for efficacy, although pesticide residues are being evaluated in some of the tests. The goal is to register these pesticides as special local need uses for Hawaii’s minor crops. They cannot be legally used at this time. Again, if you plan to label your taro as “organically grown” these chemicals may not be appropriate for use.

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**JUST A THOUGHT**

Last time we had talked about ideas to sell more poi taro, especially during times of glut. How about some new ideas for other snack foods from Chinese taro? If you’ve been watching the Jack in the Box commercials on TV you have seen curly fries, well how about curly *taro* fries? Or how about taro waffle fries? You may be able to purchase the processing equipment from local restaurant supply companies if you plan to process them yourself, for instance at all the craft fairs where curly potato-fries are being made. Or if you are a taro farmer perhaps you could get local french fry making companies interested in this idea. Be forewarned, however, that cutting taro is harder than potato and so some modifications of equipment may be necessary.

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**IN THIS ISSUE OF**

**The Taro Tattler**

- Air-Shipped taro sticker introduced
- Third annual taro festival at Windward
- Taro making you itchy, here’s help
- There's plenty of business help out there

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