Howzit! Yes, it has been a long time since our last Taro Tattler. In fact last year we only got to put out one issue, Vol. 5. No. 1, January-August 1993. Actually, we did try to get a Tattler or two together but the dog ate the drafts ... really =:)

Anyway, we’re excited to have the chance to touch base again with you and fill you in on the latest taro happenings. But, before we start, we’d like to take a minute to say thank you to all who have contributed to the betterment of the taro industry. Folks, the only way taro is going to continue to grow and prosper on all islands is with continued (and perhaps intensified) hard work by those who have most to gain—you! We also need to keep up the lines of communication because there are a number of new taro production projects on the drawing boards out there, and if they all come on line at once or shoot for the same market—problems are soon to follow. This may also be true of the many community-based projects, folks we are all in this together as a state not one valley against another.

Now today we start with a couple more creative projects from our fictitious family, Leilani and Rachael, and their friends. We continue with some information which may help people understand the recurrent “poi shortage”, we then present some research results that may be of great value to you, and finally we just saunter through a whole lot of other stuff, so fasten your seat belt...

Rachael, Leilani’s daughter is now in high school and is beginning to get interested in her own small jewelry design business. Encouraged by her mother’s amazing work ethic and by her appreciation for native plants, Rachael is now making earrings and pendants in the form of plants which are somewhat endemic or native to Hawaii. Her company Endemic Inspirations, first pieces were gold taro leaf earrings which were modeled after the small leaves she saw in a bottle of tissue-cultured taro. The leaves, and thus the earrings, are about the size of a finger nail and are perfect in every detail. And if you like these you should see her banana and anthurium flower earrings.

Not to be outdone, Rachael’s next door neighbor, Samuel Penn Cartwright has also been hard at work on taro. These two teenagers have grown up with each other and have always been a bit competitive (actually we think they really like each other, but are just shy). Samuel, who has been vegetarian for a few years, has always had taro at the table because he works part time on Leilani’s farm, but lately this young man is discovering his penchant for cooking with it. The aspiring young chef has been experimenting recently with two dishes he would like to see in his future vegetarian cafe: curried taro manapua (pictured) and gourmet taro burgers. Wow! and we thought kids these days weren’t motivated...

BACKTRACKING

Windward C.C. Pacific Island Taro Festival
Another big crowd was on hand for the Pacific Island Taro Festival on Saturday, July 2. There was some great music and the booths were fun and very informative. Taro huli and kulolo were big sellers as was Umu, Imu and Lovo food. This annual event is becoming a mainstay at Windward Community College and we thank those folks and all the volunteers for hosting this event.
Second East Maui Taro Festival
Over a nice March weekend earlier this year hundreds of people gathered to talk taro in Hana, Maui. This second event was warmly received by all who went and was a tribute to good organization by the volunteers. One of many treats at the event was the first showing of Victoria Keith's "Back to the Roots" video highlighting many of the great names in taro production. The next festival is scheduled for April 1, 1995 so get your plane reservations made now!

SMALL RESEARCH GRANTS

LISA Funding
Applications for Low Input Sustainable Agriculture (LISA) research grants will be available starting July 30, 1994. Farmers, this is your chance to do some research on your own farm so act quickly and decisively. Applications will be due by August 30 and the money will be allocated by September 30. Write the LISA for Hawaii Project, 200 Kanoeluehavae., Suite 103-281, Hilo, HI 96720 or call 959-4205 for the applications.

TARO NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

WESTERN SAMOA: The big news in taro on the international scene has been the near collapse of the very important taro industry in Western and American Samoa. Western Samoa where some 67 million pounds of taro was produced in 1992 (Hawaii produced about 10% of that or 6.7 million in the same year), is nearly down to its last corm as a particular strain of Phytophthora is ruining both leaf and corm. While the government has spent lots of money on chemicals and manpower the outlook is bleak. Scientists are looking for other varieties of taro which are disease tolerant or resistant and have been in Hawaii and other Pacific Islands recently.

For those of you wondering about what is happening with the export of Samoan taro, well of course there is little or none. Many market orders are being filled, however, out of Fiji as they had a relatively good supply of the Niue variety on hand. As for the 500,000 pound plus market in Hawaii for Samoan taro or the 1-2 million pound market on the Mainland, well lets just say that opportunities like this don't come around that often...

FARMER-TO-FARMER NETWORKING

In conjunction with the 1994 Pacific Islands Taro Festival, Windward Community College sponsored a gathering of wetland taro growers on Friday, July 1. The meeting was held at the Reppun family farm in Waiahole Valley. The gathering gave assembled taro farmers a chance to talk story and share information on a great number of taro-related issues. The meeting was attended by wetland taro farmers from each island and from a number of taro associations.

Topics of interest included the use of ground covers around taro patches to eliminate or reduce herbicide use; cultural practices to control corm rots; green manure crops for fallow between taro plantings; azolla management for weed control, Hawaiian taro varieties and water management issues.

There was much talk of the need to support wetland taro production to preserve a lifestyle rich in tradition, custom and value. Many participants expressed their vision of establishing small poi factories around the state to provide poi to their local communities.

The wetland taro growers enjoyed the gathering and are planning a follow-up farmer-to-farmer meeting in conjunction with the Hanalei Taro Festival coming this October. For further information on the meeting call Rodney Haraguchi, President of the Kauai Taro Farmers Association, 826-6202.

Windward Community College expresses their mahalo to Charlie, Paul and Laurie Reppun for hosting the gathering, and to Nancy Glover for organizing the event.

TARO PLANTS FOR SALE

One of the spin-offs of taro tissue culture research (See Research Results below) has been the expansion of commercial production of taro plantlets by Keaau Plantation Laboratory, Paradise Propagations and others in Hilo. The idea of tissue culture is to take a small sample of the growing tip of the taro, multiply it and then raise new small taro plants from it. Once in the field these plants can be then further multiplied via keiki and huili — it's a great way to get your farm off on the right foot or to populate a new field on your existing farm. Call Keaau at 959-0225 or Paradise at 936-5559 for prices and species selection.

Remember, there is a quarantine on Big Island taro huili and keiki due to the taro root aphid and so you CANNOT move these plant parts to other islands — But tissue cultured plants can be shipped to outer islands.

LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

Down at the Legislature Representative Dennis Arakaki, Chair of the Committee on Hawaiian Affairs, introduced HR 385 HD 1 and HCR 455, Requesting the State of Hawaii to Promote Taro and Poi Products. The resolution passed out of that committee and it also passed the House Finance Committee. The resolution, with no funds attached, urged "the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, the Department of Hawaiian Homelands, the Board of Agriculture, the Department of Land and Natural Resources, the Water Resource Management Commission, the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, and the University of Hawaii College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources to investigate ways to promote and encourage the cultivation and processing of taro to meeting the growing demand for taro products in the local, domestic, and foreign markets."

In the College's testimony we noted that a great deal of information is available and that we are there to help people with that information. Further, we made the following suggestions among others: that an inventory of available land and water be performed, and when done have it translated to Hawaiian by OHA; then have...
POI SHORTAGES, SOME HINTS TO THEIR ROOT CAUSE

About this time each year we get calls from the newspapers asking what caused the poi shortage this year. Of course our first response is that there is not enough poi taro available, and then we launch into a comprehensive list of potential reasons why this might be so. So we felt it was time to get some of those reasons down on paper, just in case there is a shortage next year, and also include a graph which helps illustrate the number one problem, "all the taros in one basket" (Hawaii Agriculture Statistics Service, 1994).

Now while this exercise in itself is valuable, it serves a greater purpose: for us to get the past and present problems down on paper, choose the ones that are real problems then get on with a clear, methodical game plan for success. That plan, of course, would include dealing with these and other challenges within our free market system.

The chart below is that of taro marketings for the past 50 years or so for the entire State. Note the rapid decline or low production in marketings since WWII on Oahu + Maui + Molokai, and on the Big Island. Note also the fairly steady production from the island of Kauai. In most cases these data represent the production of taro, produced under both wetland and dryland conditions, which is ultimately made into poi. Thus when the Kauai supply of poi taro is damaged it incorporates the whole system into turmoil. You may notice, however, a slight increase in the marketings from the Big Island since the early 80's, but most of that is due to the increase in acres of Chinese taro. So how is the poi taro supply situation to be improved???

Some Potential Reasons Why There is Not Enough Poi Taro Available (Grown) for Milling

Having 60% of the entire supply of taro grown on Kauai and most in one valley (thus putting all our taros in one basket) leaves the whole state market vulnerable to hazards like Iniki (see chart).

Taro is a crop that people, on average, haven't been interested in growing because of the high labor requirements and image of the job.

Taro farming or farming in general does not come with medical insurance benefits.

Taro farming or farming in general is not really taught in schools.

Pests and diseases are making it difficult to make money growing taro.

Our economy offers attractive work alternatives to young and older potential taro farmers.

Most taro farmers at the present time are part timers with a first income, and many of the full time farmers are elderly with few, younger, full time, long-term replacements on the horizon.

There is not enough land, at a price (in money or time) potential farmers are willing to pay, with the correct agronomic characteristics, and at a location suitable to the average grower.

There is not enough water, at a price potential farmers are willing to pay, on land that meets the above requirements.

Some consumers think that the best looking or tasting poi is made from taro grown under wetland conditions, so dryland opportunities are not being fully explored.

There is not enough good taro planting material available, at a price (in money or time) potential farmers are willing to pay.

For some farmers the relative price paid for poi taro is too low, so who wants to grow more taro?

For some farmers the relative price paid for poi taro is finally getting good, so why produce much more taro and risk bringing the price down (from the consumer side of course, the story is different)?

For some farmers they just cannot spend any more time growing taro than they do now.
OHA establish and invest in a Master Taro and Apprentice Program; finally that Hawaiian Homelands should set aside some land in each housing development where people could grow taro and other crops they want. Note: these were only suggestions, are not binding, and were not put in the final Resolution. In the Office of Hawaiian Affairs testimony they pointed out that they have provided about $127,000 in three loans and $165,000 in seven grants in the past two years to taro related activities. In summary, all groups who testified were supportive of the measure and said they would do what they could to help.

Oh, by the way on the OHA funding opportunities, a few misconceptions have surfaced recently so we called and asked for some clarification. There are two types of funds: Grants are for organizations with a business plan and (lower-interest) loans from the revolving fund are for individuals. At this time we hear that loans and $165,000 in seven grants in the near future noting that tourists to Hawaii want to leave with an exotic product and that is just what Marshall Island chips are...humm is that a challenge?

CHATTING CHIPS

Majuro’s Chip Factory
Hawaii taro chippers heads up, there may be a new taro chip in town late this year. According to a recent issue of Pacific Magazine, people in the Marshall Islands have opened a breadfruit and taro chip factory. While they are having trouble getting the breadfruit and taro (not a new story here) they expect to start exporting chips to Hawaii (mostly Oahu) some time in the near future noting that tourists to Hawaii want to leave with an exotic product and that is just what Marshall Island chips are...

EDUCATION A TOP PRIORITY

Ku’u Home Kulaiwi
We’ve all heard about education being important and some folks really mean it. While the Reppun’s, Eric Enos and the Kaala Project folks and others have always been great supporters of education of kids for a number of years, some others have also come to help. Oahu’s Central Sun Press, June 16-22, 1994 edition shows Mr. Frank “Uncle Palani” Sinenci and friends working with some school kids at the Ku’u Home Kulaiwi. This education project is on the boarder of Haleiwa and Waialua. For more information call Frank at 621-0503.

The Pa’alakai Waialua Lo’i Project
Near the above site on the North Shore of Oahu is this new and exciting community project. Headed by some really hard working folks at the Native Hawaiian Advisory Council and their avid supporters, the project hopes to reinvigorate the interest in growing and eating taro. With a lease on five acres the group has restored and planted about one acre or about three Lo’i. Mr. Kunani Nihipali is even planting the huli in accordance with Hawaiian moon calendar. While these folks have lots of energy your help would be appreciated. Volunteers can contact David Martin at the NHAC at 523-1445 for more info.

GOOD TIMES AT H ILO HIGH
On the Big Island Mr. Jimmy Naniole and friends are working with taro and some talented kids at Hilo High School and both the kids and their instructors are coming out winners. They’ve got all kinds of taro and other crops growing near the school and have recently been given some additional land—excellent!

MUDDY TIMES AT HNC
And the good folks at the Hawaii Nature Center (HNC) in Makiki Valley on Oahu are again giving kids of all ages a chance to learn about taro with their monthly Taro Patch Parties. Saturday August 20th and Saturday September 24th are their next ones. Call the Center at 955-0100 for more information on this fun and muddy event.

To all the educators out there, mahalo and please keep up the good work! Please contact us if you have a project you will like to share with our readers. Also, folks let us all practice “safe taro reproduction” by making sure huli and keiki don’t have snails or snail eggs on them or that we don’t spread the taro aphid which is found on the Big Island.

TELEVISION AND VIDEO

SPOTLIGHT ON TARO FARMERS

In a real celebration of taro, “Back to the Roots” debuted on Public Television earlier this year. This beautiful and well edited video explores all kinds of issues by 30 taro farmers and millers on five islands. It is a truly inspiring video that shows that people really do care about taro and what they are willing to do to keep it alive and well — great for inspiring kids. Thank you Victoria Keith, Dana Hall and all the production crew for this work. Thanks also to the people who took the time to be interviewed and mahalo to the groups who sponsored this work. Get your own copy of the VHS tape by sending a check ($30 individuals or $50 organizations/institutions) to: Victoria Keith Productions, P.O. Box 61845, Honolulu, HI 96839.

FESTIVAL FEVER

1st Kauai Taro Festival
Scheduled for around October 20-22 in Hanalei, this is the first taro festival in the heartland of taro production in Hawaii. Not much information about the location of the festival is available at this time, but keep your eyes open to the newspapers notices as the event approaches. Another farmer-to-farmer session will also be held at this event.

2nd Honokaa Aloha Taro Festival
Scheduled for November 11 and 12, Friday and Saturday of the Veteran’s Day weekend. On the rim of one of the bigger taro-baskets of the state, Waipio Valley, is the quite and nice town of Honokaa. Last year’s festival was a smash hit with residents and visitors alike.

1st Honolulu Taro Festival?
Word is that a taro festival may be held in conjunction with next years...

PROCESSOR ROUNDUP

Occasionally we like to survey the horizon to see whose out there and this time we will try to enumerate the poi millers and chippers. This listing is by observation only and if we have incorrect or incomplete information please let us know!

POI MILLERS

Oahu
Waiahole Poi
Haleiwa Poi
Honolulu Poi (HPC)
Molokai
Aloha Poi
Big Island
Puueo Poi
Kona Ohana Poi
Molokai
Molokai Poi
Kauai
Kapaa Poi
Hawaiian Farmers of Hanalei
Makaweli Poi
We'd like to say aloha and maholo to Kalihi Poi and Waimea Poi who have (fairly) recently retired their operations. Now for the chippers:

TARO CHIPPERS

Oahu
Yick Lung Co.
Big Island
Atebara Potato Chips Co.
Big Island Taro Chips
Mauna Kea Agronomics
Molokai
Molokai Taro Chips
Kauai
Taro Ko Chips
Javellana Farm

THIS IS A TEST....
OF POI AND FLOUR

One of the more tasty bits of research going on in Hawaii is on the production of a number of (currently non-commercially grown) varieties of taro and then gauging their resulting taste as poi. On the Big Island Susan Miyasaka of the College and friends have been pulling taro from test plots, cooking them and then pounding them into poi. The interaction with poi eaters from the community is helping to gauge the interest in varieties of taro that are not often cultivated. We hear the same type of activity went on with College researchers on Molokai—finger lick'n good!

Also in the test phase is The White Taro Project. This project, which you may have been hearing about for a few years, is attempting to gauge the commercial viability of producing and milling white varieties of taro into a flour which could be used in the manufacture of high-value foods for people with food sensitivities. The project has moved out of the laboratory and into the pilot-scale phase with the beginnings of a test facility being put in place with the cooperation of the C. Brewer company. A patent application for the processing science is currently at the patent office in Washington D.C. While the project is progressing conservatively we do have high hopes, stay tuned. Below you will find the results of more exciting work on taro...

RESEARCH RESULTS

Handbook for Commercial-Scale Taro (Colocasia esculenta) Tissue Culture in Hawaii (RES 145), by R. Keolanui, S. Sanxter and J. Hollyer. Need to know how to take your tissue culture experience and apply it to producing lots of small taro plants? Well, try this small booklet! Call the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources on Oahu at 956-3176 to obtain a copy.

The Economics of Commercial Wetland Taro Production in Hawaii (AB 007), by K. Fleming. Want to know about how much it might cost you to grow an acre of wetland taro? Well then this handy 6 page guide will advise you of it. Further, by contacting the author you can get the computer spreadsheet template which will allow you to perform an analysis of your farm whether it is for wetland or dryland production. Contact your local extension agent or write Kent Fleming at University of Hawaii - Manoa, Kealakekua, HI 96750-0208 for a copy of the study and the spreadsheet.

Taro Diseases: A Guide for Field Identification (RES 148), by J. Ooka. Looking for a way to identify what little nasty is attacking your taro? Then look to this new booklet to provide some answers. The author is one of the leading taro pest specialists. Call the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources on Oahu at 956-3176 to obtain a copy. Note: there may be a charge for this publication.

And speaking of diseases, Jeri Ooka thinks he has found a new one on taro. He describes it as a Basidiomycete Corm Rot which is "dry to semi-dry, yellowish white to gray rot beginning in the lower portion of the corm at about the soil line and working its way into the corm."—Yummy! P.S. Whoever owns this disease please come and pick it up as it may become big trouble!

Apple Snail (Pomacea canaliculata). The Plant Pest Control Branch of the Department of Agriculture has recently released two very informative fact sheets on the Apple Snail. The first is a blue sheet written in both English and Ilocano, tells about the snail and what to do about it, the second is a color poster—like work that has a picture of the snail and its eggs. Call your local DOA office to receive these informative sheets and pass them around your community. Keeping this pest down is every farmer's responsibility! The Oahu DOA number is 973-9538.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES

Take Home Aloha Recipes – Taro, Taro Leaves and Poi, by Food Consultants of Hawaii. This handy little booklet (with an excellent cover) is a great cookbook with some very non-traditional taro recipes. The booklet was initially sponsored by Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism and the Hawaii State Department of Agriculture. Send $4.50 (postage included) to Food Consultants of Hawaii, P.O. Box 23113, Honolulu, HI 96822.
THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

If you sell the latter two types of taro to a fresh market it won't make anyone's day and may cost you a fist full of dollars.

1994 Directory – LISA for Hawaii Project, by Bart Jones. This directory just got done but it was worth the wait. It contains names of some farms where produce is grown in the traditional way and farms where produce is grown organically. In addition there are names of resources and other good stuff. For your copy write: “LISA for Hawaii Directory,” 200 Kanoeluhua Ave. Suite 103-281, Hilo, HI 96720. P.S. For those of you who know the hard working Bart we bid him and his wonderful wife Cory a fond Aloha as they take up life in Las Vegas.

A Bibliography of Kalo (Taro) in the Hawaiian Culture, by Maile B. Davis. This bibliography of books, articles and the like is a great piece of library detective work on the connection of taro with the Hawaiian people. While it was finished in 1986 it is still very relevant and timely. For a copy go the UH Hamilton Library, check for (SB211.T2 D38 1986a) in the database and bring change for a photocopy machine, about 20 pages.

Well we hope it was worth the wait. Take care and when you are in the field don't forget the sun screen, and don't forget to wash the mud off your boots before you come into the house! Aloha...

IN THIS ISSUE OF

The Taro Tattler

- Taro Festival Wrap-up and Warm-up
- Wetland Taro Cost of Production
- Poi Shortages, Some Thoughts
- Community Taro Patches
- More on Apple Snails

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