

The Taro Tattler



University of Hawaii
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources



For Growers, Shippers, and Processors of Chinese, Poi, Dasheen, and Pacific Island Taros from Hawaii

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January-February 1991

Good tidings for the New Year! In our first newsletter of 1991 we have an exciting collection of information for you. Our main feature is a discussion on making more money (perhaps one of your New Years resolutions) through production planning (*hopefully* another one of your resolutions!). Other features will bring you abreast of news you need to know. But first, the headlines...

Chinese and Vietnamese New Years are Coming!!

Will you have Chinese taro ready for the 15th of February, in time for the Chinese and Vietnamese New Years? Well, if you do you might want to consider advertising that fact in the Asian-language newspapers both in Hawaii and on the Mainland. **James Lee** of May Produce in LA says that it is the perfect time to sell a little more of your QUALITY-only product and at the same time line yourself up for future sales. There are a couple of things to remember if you are going to do this however:

- 1) Promise only what you can deliver. If you find yourself coming up short work with other farmers to fill the order.
- 2) Your product must be of first-rate QUALITY (clean — no cuts, sized, proper weight, and 1-2" of green on top) and be well marked — use the bag tags developed last year! *Perhaps this is the time to do the multi-language brochure we've been talking about...hint, hint?? If your hui is interested in developing and funding such a brochure contact us here at the Tattler.*
- 3) A reduction in unit price often nets a greater quantity sold. This is especially true as your competition, Mexican and Dominican Republic taros, are already cheaper. You will also create some goodwill in the process.
- 4) Work very closely with your wholesaler from the word go...you can't afford to flood the market. Remember other Hawaii farmers may want to do this too and there is only so much market at the moment.
- 5) Work closely with the newspaper ad people, as they say, "you don't get a second chance to make a first impression."
- 6) Don't leave your regular customers short — their needs

and your good working relationship should not be compromised for a few extra bucks.

- 7) Don't wait, call your wholesaler today and see if this New Years' marketing scheme is an idea that has potential and one you both can profit from — on this occasion or all year long. If it doesn't work out all you've invested is the price of a phone call.

ISSUE FOCUS PRODUCTION PLANNING

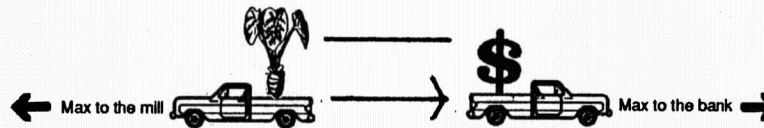
In the last issue of the *Tattler* we talked about sales and marketing planning. We'd like to take a step back now and talk about production planning. Again, it should be stressed that you shouldn't plant until you have a buyer lined-up. However, once you've established this crucial business relationship you should plant your crop, and plan its maintenance, in an organized fashion. On the following page we provide some (hypothetical) examples, one with a more-successful farmer, Max, and one with a less-successful farmer, Jim. These examples are intended to give you some ideas on how to, and how not to, plan. (We are using wetland taro and poi here in this example, but the concepts are applicable to Chinese, Polynesian, and dasheen taro, as well as luau leaf).

Max is a farmer who has been able to work closely with her buyer/miller, No Ka Oi Poi, for the last 5 years. As wetland taro is a 14 month crop for Max she has again sat down with her buyer this year and has planned her crop production for this year and next. Yields for Max have run about 30,000 pounds per acre the last couple of years (she knows this because she has checked her production log book which is a little more detailed than this chart because it contains information on number of huli planted, chemical use, rain fall, man-hours, sales prices, etc.) and she and her husband and a few part time workers have been planting about 1/4 acre a week on average. The folks at No Ka Oi told Max that, as always, during the winter months consumption of poi decreases and so they can not buy a lot of taro from her from about October to February. However, they are willing to buy X amount during these months and to buy an even greater quantity of corms during the warmer

THE TARO FARMER, POI MILLER PLANNING CALENDAR

MAX's TARO FARM -- Planting Schedule																											
'1991												'1992															
Field Designation	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec			
Back 40 (1 ac.)			<-- Planting				--Maintain--				Harvest-->																
Front 40 (1.5 ac)						<-- Planting				--Maintain--				Harvest-->													
By the house (.5 ac.)							<-- Planting				--Maintain--				Harvest-->												
Mauka A (1 ac.)								<-- Planting				--Maintain--				Harvest-->											
Mauka B (.5 ac.)									<-- Planting				--Maintain--				Harvest-->										
Makai (1 ac.)									<-- Planting				--Maintain--				Harvest-->										

JIM's TARO FARM -- Planting Schedule																										
'1991												'1992														
Field Designation	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec		
Backyard (1 ac.)								<-- Planting				--Maintain--				Harvest-->										
Field 1 (1.5 ac)										<-- Planting				--Maintain--				Harvest-->								
Field 2 (.5 ac.)								<-- Planting				--Maintain--				Harvest-->										
Mauka I (1 ac.)										<-- Planting				--Maintain--				Harvest-->								
Mauka II (.5 ac.)								<-- Planting				--Maintain--				Harvest-->										
Makai A (1 ac.)										<-- Planting				--Maintain--				Harvest-->								



		NO KA OI POI's -- Purchasing Schedule																							
		'1992												'1993											
	Farm Designation	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
M	Back 40 (1 ac.)																								
A	Front 40 (1.5 ac)																								
X	By the house (.5 ac.)																								
's	Mauka A (1 ac.)																								
	Mauka B (.5 ac.)																								
	Makai (1 ac.)																								
J	Backyard (1 ac.)																								
I	Field 1 (1.5 ac)																								
M	Field 2 (.5 ac.)																								
's	Mauka I (1 ac.)																								
	Mauka II (.5 ac.)																								
	Makai A (1 ac.)																								

months when luaus, weddings, graduations and other such activities are more likely to happen. Max knows that planting during the winter time can be more costly and difficult because of the rain and because of the fact that weeds grow faster and thus cost more money to remove. Despite this, Max has calculated that the extra money gained from the higher summer taro price is more than enough to compensate for the extra weeding expense. Max's planning (the top of page 2) is providing her with a more predictable flow of profits, and all it took was a calendar drawn on a piece of paper and about an hour of her miller's time.

Not everyone is into planning however, even if it takes only a few moments. Max's friend Jim, the new taro farmer on the *ahupua'a*, doesn't plan to coordinate at all with his proposed buyers. His attitude is that he had heard that poi millers were so hard up that they would buy all taro any time. So his "plan" is to plant only when it is convenient for him — during the warm summer (middle of page 2) and sell it at his leisure. Jim will start planting in June of 1991 and his taros will begin to mature in July of the next year. Over the first week in July 1992 he will begin to harvest and bring about 15,000 lbs of fresh and week-old corms to No Ka Oi Poi — this is what will happen: The owner of the poi mill will say that he would like to buy *some* of the taro, but because it was on the spur of the moment (he hasn't had time to prepare his market for an increase in supply), and because some of the taro have gone bad, he could only buy X lbs of the taro which was harvested yesterday. Needless to say, Jim will be eating a great deal taro that summer and will lose a great deal of money.

While we realize these examples are slightly exaggerated, they are so to make a point — **plan to sell before you plan to plant**. There are farmers out there like Max and Jim — Max's success comes from planning, while Jim's failure comes from not planning — any questions?

MIXED PLATE

HASS Presents the Poi Report

The good folks down at the Hawaii Agricultural Statistics Service (HASS) recently started a quarterly report on the milling of Poi. This informative, one page document provides some insight into the present and historical supply conditions for Poi. Many thanks to the processors and the government for this worthwhile effort.

In related news, Ron Nakamura and his colleagues at HASS wish to thank all those taro farmers who answered the yearly taro production survey which was conducted late last year. The results of that survey are out in HASS's 1990 annual taro report. The folks at HASS say that if you are a commercial taro farmer of any size (i.e. you sell *some* of your crop) and wish to partake in this important yearly event (how else are people going to know the value of the taro industry??), please contact them at 548-7155.

Ho'opulapula Haraguchi Rice Mill Restoration Helps Cultivate Young People's Minds on Kauai

Looking down on Hanalei Valley from the lookout, you will see on the left side of the Valley just mauka of the bridge, the recently restored 60 year old rice mill belonging to the Haraguchi family. This monument to the ingenuity of the Valley's many settlers provides a focal point from which tours are given to young and old. The reconstruction and the concept surrounding the rice mill project is also a sign of the resurgence of community and family-based values to be found in the area. One such value which is embodied in the tour is that of educating young people about the opportunities and importance of taro production to the people of Hawaii. If you are interested in learning more about this fantastic project call Karol or Rodney Haraguchi or Susan Summers at 826-6202. Hats off to these hard working people and all those that are involved with the project.

Hawaii's Plantation Village Grows in Waipahu's Cultural Garden Park

In a similar project, the good folks of Waipahu, Oahu have begun to re-create a Hawaii plantation setting with all the trimmings. Located just around the corner from Arakawa's store is a large flood plain area, which is the sight of vigorous community activity. In amongst the commercial luau leaf patches, which are fed by artesian wells, are various planned croppings of plants (including taro) which were (and are still) grown by the many ethnic groups associated with plantation life. Tools and personal and household artifacts belonging to former plantation workers are found in the museum on the site. Authentic plantation houses and other structures are soon to be built there. The area is a real hands-on learning experience for those who come to the park, especially for "at risk" students who learn not only about taro and other types of farming, but gardening and landscaping, and about museum curation as well. For more information about this creative project call Alan Iwasaki at the park at 676-6727.

Chemically Speaking

While taro has relatively few pests there is often a need to control the nasty few. Joe DeFrank of the Department of Horticulture has news on Safer™ products, Goal™, Paraquat, and Methyl Bromide.

Safer use of Safer™

Joe says that product labeling and the understanding of those labels is of great importance for the use of any chemical. There have been reports that some taro farmers and farm employees have been using the wrong Safer™ products. Safer™ makes a variety of crop protection products which are derived from fatty acids and have received approval from the EPA for use on many food crops. Problems can arise, however, when users approach a store shelf with a variety of Safer™ products on it. Since all products bear the same corporate logo (colors vary for target pests), users wanting to buy an insecticidal product may inadver-

tently pickup a weed killer — *this is especially true of people who do not have a good command of the English language.* Therefore, with this and all crop protection products, be sure to read the label carefully before purchasing and again before making an application to food crops.

Goal™ and Paraquat

The final Supplemental Use Labels for the use of Goal™ and Paraquat on taro have arrived. Call Joe or your extension agent for them. Remember you can not legally apply these chemicals without the Label.

Methyl Bromide

All the field work for Methyl Bromide on taro has been completed and Joe is about to send all the necessary paper work to the EPA to start their review process.

Questions regarding these and other chemical products can be directed to Dr. Joe DeFrank (956-8050) at CTAHR's Department of Horticulture.

Thanks to Joe DeFrank, Mike Kawate, Carl Miles, and all the other researchers and cooperating farmers for their continued support of the chemical registration process.

Note: If you are planning to "go organic" in taro you may want to check with California's, or another state's organic certification guidelines before you apply these or any other chemicals to your crop. At the time of this writing Hawaii is still without such guidelines.

The New Chippers on the Block

Molokai Taro Chips (Bill's Farm) and Yick Lung Co. of Oahu have now thrown their style of taro chips into the bowl — so to speak. Both of these companies started chipping late last year and they join four Hawaii (Big Island, Atebara's, Taro Ko, and Waimea) and two Mainland (Granny Goose and Ray's) firms already chipping taro — good luck to all!

On a related topic, *Terra Chips* are now flown to Hawaii from New York by the culinary supply shop, **The Compleat Kitchen**, says their Jan-Feb 1991 newsletter. The \$9 freshness-dated package of goodies includes 8oz of crispy fried chips made from beet, yam, sweet potato, lotus root, parsnip and...taro! When asked how they sold these expensive chips (even though you can't see them in their solid silver mylar bag), the knowledgeable staff at the Kahala mall branch said they simply gave interested buyers a taste — chippers are you listening??

SOURCES AND RESOURCES

Abre Xpress Flies Your Taro to LA

There's a new air cargo company in town and they're fix'n to haul your taro to market. Abre Xpress offers Wednesday and Saturday flights from Hilo-Honolulu-LA; carrying a number of commodities including taro. They are also flying a twice monthly Pago Pago(A. Samoa)-Apia(W.

Samoa)-LA flight which will also be carrying taro and other island items to market. Call these flying entrepreneurs on Oahu at 833-9999 for more information.

Food Quality Lab Does Nutritional-Quality Work-up

If you are planning to provide a nutritional label on your taro-based product (a good idea!!) you may wish to have an up-to-date nutritional analysis performed on it. The full analysis takes a few weeks to perform and costs a few hundred dollars, but will provide your customers with a lot of valuable information. Call this company on Oahu at 841-4484 for more information. Thanks to **Aurora Hodgson** of the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition for the contact.

For more information please contact:

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TO: