

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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Well, we are slowly coming out of what some people are calling the worst poi shortage in years. While a few people didn't see it to be as critical as all that, there is no doubt that people were waiting in early morning lines outside of poi mills this summer (just like they do for rock concerts!) and poi hoarding was a problem for some retailers (when there was any poi to be had in the first place). Due to natural supply and demand conditions consumers are having to pay more than ever for poi, which in turn has given poi-taro farmers their highest spot farm gate price ever — at least \$.35/pound!

There are no surprises in the paragraph above — you've seen most of it all your lives, as did your parents and their parents before them. This is because shortages of poi taro have been a part of agriculture in this State for many, many years — actually is almost a *tradition* during the summer time. These shortages can be attributed to any one or a combination of conditions including: natural (weather), man-made (crop production practices), or market (farm gate price—and how it relates to buying inputs, such as labor), among others. While we can't do much to fool mother nature (*besides it wouldn't be nice*), we can try to make as much money as we can despite her, by overcoming inefficient practices in the areas of marketing and production. However, to do this requires planning. In this issue of the *Tattler* we will talk about marketing planning (something the bonehead in this Larson cartoon didn't do) and in



the following issue about production planning. But first, as always, we must do a little...

BACK TRACKING

Since last we spoke in May, a lot of taro-related activities have taken place. They include:

The Taro Industry Analysis Number 4

The fourth Taro Industry Analysis was held in Hilo on Friday, June 15, 1990. The meeting was attended by about 35 people from the public and private sectors. Research priorities for the next few years, some of which are currently being worked on, were set for the industry as a whole and for both dry- and wetland cultivation techniques. Topics identified are found in the table below.

Mahalo to Dwight Sato and the folks at the Komohana St. office for hosting this event.

The next step in the analysis processes was to re-draft the analysis document which was reviewed by the people who attended the meeting or who sent or called in constructive comments. A final copy of the analysis was presented to the Governor's Agricultural Coordinating Committee (GACC) on August 29th by volunteers Isaac and Gladys Kanoa, taro farmers from Keanae, Maui — many thanks to them!

As a result of Kanoa's presentation, GACC funded over \$100,000 in taro research out of their budget, and will oversee an additional \$90,000 from legislative provisos. A special vote of thanks goes to Joanna Nakata of GACC for her unending help with the analysis process. And lastly, thanks to David Penn of the UH Geography Department for some great work done on the Land and Water sections of the analysis document. More on these and other UH research projects is coming in future editions of the *Tattler*.

The Pacific Islands Taro Festival, July 28 — Windward Community College — Oahu

There were songs, dance, talks, and imu-umu-lovos on this partly cloudy summer day, yet this event was declared a success by all who attended. The samples of taro and other foods cooked in various traditional ways were delicious

and the talks informative. Plans are already underway for next year's festival which hopes to feature even more Pacific Island foods — stay tuned for more information. Thanks to Roy Fujimoto, his staff, and 'Windward' for hosting the event, and to Mitsue Cook Carlson and a group of multi-ethnic, multi-talented volunteers for their help in organizing and putting on this very unique festival.

card catalog in the library, but you will still need to track down the paper, book, etc. in the library.

A big mahalo goes out to the folks in the media who have taken the time to alert interested people on all islands about these and other taro-related events. ed.

Research Priorities as Identified by Taro Industry in Analysis Number 4 (in order of importance)

Industry as a Whole

1. Mechanization
2. Cultivar-breeding/nursery
3. Disease control
4. Post-Harv. Hand & Processing
5. Land
6. Capital
7. Labor
8. Marketing, Econ. and Processing
9. Cultural Mgt.- Fertilizer use
- Unprioritized-Information delivery system

Wetland

1. Mechanization
2. Water-distribution
3. Cultivar-Indexing
4. Culture & Management-water use
5. Weed control
6. Insect control

Dryland

1. Insect control
2. Weed control
3. Cultivar-Indexing
4. Culture & Management-water use
5. Water-distribution

White Taro, Another Opportunity: Allergen-free Food Products from Hawaii, October 24 —East-West Center — Oahu

This well attended symposium gave a chance for larger farmers and Agribusinesses to get into the taro game by highlighting potential allergen-free food products made from as yet uncommercialized white-fleshed taros, such as Haokea. Representatives from most of Hawaii's taro hui and other interested organizations were in attendance at this DBED, DOA and UH sponsored event. Thanks to the farmers and processors who helped us out during this time!

Molokai Taro Conference — November 2 & 3 — Molokai

These very enlightening meetings stressed not only production and marketing aspects of taro, but the cultural aspects as well. Many of Hawaii's taro-growing ethnic groups were represented by farmers such as Harry Otsuka and George Kahumoku; showing that taro is indeed a food of importance for many people in Hawaii. Generously funded by OHA, this event was sponsored by the Molokai Institute of Agriculture and co-sponsored by the UH Cooperative Extension Service, DBED, Hikiola Cooperative and Maui Community College-Molokai farm.

Taro Database On-Line

The taro bibliographic database is now fully operational! Cooperators Scott Campbell, Peter Rotar, Jim Hollyer, and Lisa Roehm of The College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources are pleased to announce that this unique research resource, which contains over 3,300 citations on taro from around the globe (many of them with abstracts), is now available in ASCII format on computer diskette or in an abbreviated hardcopy form. For more information call Scott Campbell (808) 956-6971 or Peter Rotar (808) 956-7317 or write them at the Department of Agronomy and Soil Science, Sherman Lab, University of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI 96822. *NOTE: This type of resource identifies research papers that have been done, somewhat like the*

PLANNING FOR MORE PROFITS

*And now...*The following discussion is based on the assumption that you (and your family) are in the taro business, for among other reasons (such as self sufficiency), to make some profit or at the very least, cover your costs. To some people attaching a profit motive to the production of the time honored food of taro is a sacrilege, but let's face it, most of the people who say that haven't spent their whole lives, or at least their childhood, hunched over in muddy water pulling weeds and corms. Taro farming like some other agricultural professions is hard work and you must get a fair return on investment for it! But seeing as you chose that calling, and someone else opened a corner grocery, and still another works in downtown Honolulu, the best we can do for you is to provide you with some ideas that you may or may not want to adopt in part or in whole.

Periodic shortages in the supply of Chinese and Poi taros can be virtually eliminated by planting/harvesting on a regular schedule, say every week or two — **all year round**. Now we can hear some of you saying that yes this could be possible *if you could afford and find* the labor for such a precise planning effort. For some of you this will not be possible, for others it may require that you and your fellow taro farmers pool your labor resources, and still for others your farm may be getting to the size that it may just be feasible to hire some labor or purchase machinery. Try out some of these concepts, it couldn't hurt! Also, let us hear about your success stories and we'll print them here in the *Tattler*. Now here are some more ideas to help you make more money...

Labeling

Last time we talked about labeling your new (and old) taro-based products or improving your current label or marketing image. (Yes, even if your customers know your packaging, applying a colorful sticker with new information on it [in a different language???) or using some other

marketing device, such as a take home recipe, might just help your business even more). From Washington D.C. comes word that in the next few years most of the package labels we see in the grocery store will need to be redone to conform to some new, yet unknown, uniform labeling standards. While this may or may not affect your product, you may want to play it safe if you are preparing a new label. Send your design and product information to Wilber Kubota at the Department of Health's, Food Products Division (548-3280) and to Bob Inamura at DOA's Department of Measurements and Standards (548-7154) for their professional and free review. You can also call Aurora Hodgson at the UH Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition at 956-6564 for more information on the new standards.

Lastly, let's look at what Nancy Lee Bently in her 1987 book, *Windows of Opportunity: The Market for Specialties and Organics* (The Food Circle Publishers), suggests to those who want to be better business-farmers:

"25 TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN SPECIALTY/ORGANIC PRODUCE"

1. Become marketers as well as producers.
2. Do the research to pinpoint the right products or product/service mix. Diversify to spread risk, but stay with familiar products that fit your soil, climate, and equipment.
3. Identify and know your market.
4. Organize and cooperate for success.
5. Adopt a professional attitude and business ethics.
6. Do your homework. Prepare a detailed marketing and business plan. Package and promote it.
7. Enlist the support of others. Involve state and local officials, private organizations, businesses, associations - at all levels.
8. Get adequate financing.
9. Employ the services of a professional broker who is knowledgeable, experienced, aggressive.
10. Know the specifications of your buyers, customers.
11. Select the right packaging and merchandising materials. Don't skimp on containers.
12. Get help, if necessary, to design an efficient and economical irrigation system.
13. Insure the quality and freshness of your product by integrating a rapid cooling or hydrocooling facility into your operation.
14. Consider value-added options such as processing, pre-preparation.
15. Set high quality control standards in production, handling and marketing.
16. Adopt a certification program for organically-grown produce.
17. Practice intensive management of your operation. Keep good business, production, marketing and sales records, incorporating computers, if possible.
18. Consider your marketing image, including the possibility of labelling, creating branded products or product line.
19. Conduct your own production research and keep up with the university, industry findings.
20. Extend your growing season. Investigate the use of plastic row covers, mulching and greenhouses to help you gain an out-of-season, pre-season or post-season marketing advantage.
21. Keep up with your industry. Subscribe to trade journals. Attend appropriate meetings such as seminars; join associations and take leadership roles.
22. Stay on top of trends. Be flexible enough to adapt. Don't forget marketing.
23. Take the time to be right the first time, avoiding frustration of failure or having to do the job over.
24. Start small, but set your sights high.
25. Think globally, act locally."

ON THE BOOKSHELF and HARD DISK

In an effort to keep you in touch with the latest reading and electronic media, here is this issue's edition of "On the Bookshelf and Hard disk". Check with your local book or computer store for more information on selected topics.

Aroids: Plants of the Arum Family, by Deni Bown, Timber Press, Portland, Oregon, 1988. This 256 page book is loaded with general information about all types of Aroids, not just taro. The book has great color photographs including one of the Kanoa farm in Keanae, Maui.

Food and Culture in America, by Pamela Kittler and Kathryn Sucher, Von Nostrand Reinhold, New York, New York, 1989. While poi and the Polynesian-Americans are conspicuously absent from this informative text, it does identify many of the foods that other new Americans are eating. Therefore, this book may be of interest to those who wish to identify a new market or crop.

Sources of Agricultural Credit in Hawaii, by John Halloran, PingSun Leung and Herbert Marutani, UH College of Tropical Agriculture, Research Extension Series 067, 1986. Many of you are looking for financial assistance in the form of a loan; this document may be a good place to start your search. Call your local extension office for a copy.

CCOF 1990 Organic Certification Handbook (\$10); CCOF 1990 Growers List (\$6.00); CCOF 1990 Farm Inspection Manual (\$10), and the CCOF Retailers Guide to Organic Food and Farming (\$15), by California Certified Organic Farmers. Write them at CCOF, P.O. Box 8136, Santa Cruz, CA 95061-8136. While Hawaii (or the Nation for that matter) still does not have an organic certification program, these items may be of interest to those of you who want to get a jump on the game.

California Grower Magazine (\$22 a year), The Tanis Group Inc., P.O. Box 697, Fallbrook, CA, 92028. While your first reaction to this suggestion may be that you not interested in what they are growing in California, let us point out that some California farmers are growing a lot of exotic fruits and vegetables these days and much of the cutting edge information on production, marketing, packaging and other areas of interest are brought out monthly in this and other similar magazines. You might use this information if you are planning to put in a new crop or to sell your product on a West Coast market.

WealthBuilder™, by Money Magazine. This IBM and Macintosh-based computer program helps you take the profits that you are making from your farm, and helps you make more money with them. It will show you how you will need to save for your goals, such as college for your kids. If you can, look for the version that is bundled with

Quicken™ that user-friendly accounting program we told you about months ago, and also the *Money Magazine* video tape on money management.

A LITTLE HELP?

In order for you, your company or your community to be successful with taro or any agricultural venture you will need to work as part of a team. In that team spirit, the following people are asking, for *A Little Help*:

How Much Water is Needed to Produce a Healthy Crop of Wetland Taro? UH Geography Department Ph.D. candidate David Penn and Dr. Tom Giambelluca would like to find out just that. They are measuring water use conditions in wetland taro pondfields on Kauai, Maui and Oahu. They plan to use the information to develop a method for estimating the amount of water needed to grow high-quality wetland taro in any area of the State. David and Tom welcome interested farmers to help with these measurements, and are also willing to help farmers make measurements of their own water use. They can be reached at the UH Department of Geography, 2424 Maile Way, Porteus 445, Honolulu, HI 96822. Telephone 956-7781 or 956-7683.

Where Have all the Hawaiian Taro Varieties Gone? Folks at the Ho'okahe Wai, Ho'oulu 'Aina, a charitable,

non-profit, community organization would like to find that out. They are the hard working volunteers that maintain the 10 year old Ka Papa Lo'i 'o Kanewai cultural garden at the University at Manoa. They are interested in obtaining and raising all the Hawaiian taro varieties that existed at the time of Captain Cook's arrival. Currently, they are concentrating their search on dryland varieties, but are also interested in the wetland ones. They include Lihilihimolina, Lauoa Uliuli or Hinapu, Papakolekoa'e or 'Akilolo, Hinupua'a or Manini, Manini Kea and others. If they can't find these taros now they may be lost forever. So if you have some of these varieties (or other rare ones) or know someone who does, please write Lolana (Ron) Fenstemacher, c/o HWWA, Box 61494, Manoa, HI 96839 or call him at 737-5442. Please help these folks and other taro garden managers keep the cultural heritage of our unique State alive.

For more information please write:

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Attn: Jim Hollyer, editor

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