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

VOL. 2, NO. 3 March/April 1990

We have a lot to accomplish in this issue of the *Tattler* so let's get busy...but before we do, kudos to Chris Anderson for his help with our new header.

FOURTH INDUSTRY ANALYSIS FOR TARO IN THE WORKS

The Governors Agricultural Coordinating Committee (GACC) and the College of Tropical Agriculture bring together members of each of Hawaii's 28 agricultural industries and related support agencies every few years to discuss industry problems and to chart a course for their resolution. The third Industry Analysis for both Dry and Wetland taros was completed July 1986. In the next few weeks, the process will again be repeated with each of the dozen or so active taro organizations (as noted in past issues of the *Tattler*) being consulted (via a written worksheet) as to their opinion regarding taro industry priorities. Later, a meeting on one of the islands will bring this information and these persons together to set the final research agenda. Input is also welcomed from individuals who contact their respective county extension agents by April 30, 1990. For more information call Dr. Ramon de la Peña, the analysis' convener and a taro production specialist, on Kauai at 822-4984.

MAIL'S IN!

Recently we received a couple of letters (and follow-up calls as noted by brackets) from individuals who share a common interest in helping Hawaii's taro farmers increase their profits by providing marketing information and outlets for Chinese and Samoan taros, respectively. The first letter is from James Lee of May Produce (a big buyer of oriental vegetables) and the second from Dick Stone of General Brokerage (perhaps the largest importer of Polynesian food products in the U.S.). We thank them both for their continuing interest and insight!

Dear Jim:

The export bag-tag looks outstanding and I believe that it will help Los Angeles buyers familiarize themselves more with Hawaii-grown Chinese taro. For your next printing, you may want to put on a few additional characters meaning, "The Real Bun Long taro variety," since the imported taros are trying to fool the inexperienced buyers under the guise of Hawaii-grown Chinese taros. They are, for instance, repacking taros in green and red mesh bags.

With the increase of the Southeast Asian population EVERY YEAR in California [and elsewhere], the Hawaii-grown Chinese taro is in great demand and so the market is very, very tight in LA. In order to keep Hawaii-grown Chinese taro on the market and in the minds of buyers the first way which comes to mind is to feed these taro-eaters on a year-round basis. If Hawaii growers fail to do so, the supply gap will be filled by the "alien" taros, namely those from the Dominican Republic, and now, from Mexico! [Yes, from a region on the same latitude as Waipio Valley on the Big Island. No, taro is not a native Mexican crop.]

In the early 80s, I remember that Hawaii-grown Dasheen was a strong item on the LA market, unfortunately now however, due to a failure to supply on a year-round basis, gradually, this item's niche was taken by others (Brazil, Costa Rica, China, and California [Fresno Dasheen]). The Hawaii-grown Dasheen is now no where to be found on the LA market. With respect to the lesson learned from the "Dasheen disaster", it is high time for Hawaii taro growers to take some emergency measures to salvage what is left of their Chinese taro market in LA, otherwise, I really doubt that we can "Market Hawaii-Grown Chinese Taro in the 90s"!! On the other hand, believe it or not, if your farmers can fill the market gap with superior quality taros all year round, we can easily block the spread of the imports. The concept is very simple, let's take Hawaii-grown gingers as a example where this principle works. When Hawaii-grown gingers are in the California market in sufficient quality and quantity, no "alien" gingers can be moved at the same time. Hawaii farmers must put themselves on full alert and be aware of the changing world and the market conditions it presents. Wake up! Wake up! Hawaii taro growers! Lend me your ears! The alien taros are coming!

James Lee
MAY PRODUCE
742 East Garvey Ave., #C
Monterey Park, CA 91754
(818) 572-3168

P.S. If you send me a copy of the conference video tapes I will do some marketing for your taro industry. Also, you may now want to begin working on a brochure which should reinforce Hawaii-grown taro's market position and at the same time acquaint new buyers with the product. Include, in a couple of Asian languages, how to handle and display taros. This is very important as many first time buyers on the Mainland may not know how to handle the product, in which case, the grower in Hawaii may be blamed and thus back-charged if there is a lack of quality, regardless of who is really to blame.

Dear Jim:

Thanks for keeping us aware of the *Taro Tattler*. The reading is most interesting even though it is being directed [mostly] to Chinese taro. We are not trying to tell your farmers their business so please don't misunderstand me, but we personally feel the farmers are placing all their efforts in one place, Chinese taro. As you know, while the market may be strong now, due to supply and demand, as greater production takes place, prices will [eventually] fall. The growers must learn to diversify their crops to maximize their revenue [over the long run].

On February 1st Samoa was severely hit by Hurricane Ofa, doing substantial damage to many of their crops, including Samoan taro root. My grower there feels that he [may] be back in production around April/May of this year, [but may be as late as June]. In the interim [and possibly in the future], we will be looking for good supplies of pink Samoan type taro root. If you are in a position to contact farmers direct, on our behalf or can give us names, addresses and phone numbers of same, it would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

RICHARD K. STONE
President, GENERAL BROKERAGE COMPANY
608 East 9th St.
Los Angeles, CA 90015
(213) 627-9032

P.S. We are also interested in Tongan taros and the Tongan yam, Ufi.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES

Business Accounting Software

Remember in a previous issue of the *Tattler* we told you how you could track the production-cost side of your operation with a Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet template produced by the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at the University? Well, for the accounting side of your business you may again want to use a computer with the highly rated program, *Quicken*. This program, which can be learned in a few hours, can be used for business and personal finances and offers many amenities such as financial reporting (cash flow reporting, profit and loss statements, and balance sheets), tax record keeping, and assets and liability statements, among others. What's more, the program is written to work with two programs which help you process your taxes: *Your Income Tax* and *TurboTax*. Purchase *Quicken* for about $50 or any combination of *Quicken* and a tax program for around $100 in local stores, or less by mail order.

CHATTING CHIPS

Granny has Packed up her Fryer and is Heading for the Coast

Granny Goose, Hawaii's largest taro chipper, will no longer be processing taro or any other types of chips in Honolulu effective immediately. The decision not to resume processing after the unexpected November shut-down is based on the company's inability to meet Honolulu City and County codes in their planned new facility in an economic fashion. The shut-down has caused dozens of permanent layoffs at the Honolulu plant. Granny Goose, however, will keep their local sales and shipping force intact after the move to their home base in Oakland, California.

The good news, however, is that Granny Goose intends to chip Hawaii-grown Chinese taros in California. The taros will be shipped via refrigerated Matson container from the Big Island on what is hoped to be a regular basis. For more information on any new packing requirements and shipping schedules for the Granny Goose shipments, contact their major consolidators, Paul Kierkiewicz and Paul Parke of Mauna Kea Agronomics, on the Big Island, at 961-2831.

Ray's Chips Distributing with Eagle Brand Snacks

Congratulations to Rich Brothers, Inc. a.k.a. Ray's [Taro] Chips of Colorado for landing an agreement to distribute their chips with Eagle Brand Snacks. This exposure should help all taro chippers wherever they may be located.

Big Island and Atebara's Taro Chips Headline for Shirokiya Festival

Big Island and Atebara's taro chips were well represented at a recent promotion at Shirokiya at the Ala Moana shopping center. Both chippers goods were located at the top of the escalator where they got great exposure. Good job, keep up the promotions!

MIXED PLATE

Taro Leaf Rustlers Spotted in the Back 40

There have been numerous reports of "leaf rustling" on all island these days. While this may seem to be a harmless (yet illegal) act, the is some evidence to suggest that corm quality can be greatly reduced if leaves are removed before harvest. If people want your leaves ask them to come on the day you harvest and exchange their help for leaves. And if all else fails, call the authorities. The next edition of the *Tattler* will focus almost exclusively on items dealing with taro leaves.

Molokai Taro Hui Established

With the help of the Cooperative Extension Service, and the Department of Business and Economic Development, the taro growers on Molokai have established an industry group: The Molokai Taro Hui. Mr. Danny Marcellino has been elected president of this group. If you have any questions about the Hui call the Cooperative Extension Service on Molokai at 567-6698.

Earth Day is April 22

On April 22 the World will celebrate Earth Day 1990; a day when we give a little back to this planet on which we live by planting trees (and taro) and cleaning up the country side, among other activities. For more information on the happenings on your island call Tina Clothier on the Big Island at 325-5452, Jilda Loomis on Kauai at 246-0325, Barbara Bitner on Maui at 872-6080—ext 3, and Linda Day or Peter Rappa at 946-0007 on Oahu [Honolulu Sunday Star Bulletin & Advertiser, April 1, 1990].

The "Legal" Quality of Poi and Other Questions

There have been some questions lately about the quality of poi on the market these days. Basically, these questions centered around the "legal" amount of solids in the poi. Sam Camp of the Department of Agriculture's Marketing Branch, notes, however, that currently there are no State laws governing the solid to liquid ratio of commercially produced/distributed poi.

Sam also said that there are Hawaii State **Grades and Standards** for dasheen, but not for the various types of taros or luau leaves. He went on to say that it is illegal to label your product with a grade or brand identification beginning with the word "Hawaii," (for example, "Hawaii Grade A Luau Leaves, " as opposed to "Galaxy Market Grade A Luau Leaves") as this gives the consumer the idea that the product is being identified under guidelines developed in cooperation with State agencies. If the industry wishes to set-up these guidelines call Sam on Oahu at 548-7138.

Bob Inamura of the DOA's department of Measurements and Standards (548-7154) notes that there are no mandatory pull-off or freshness date label requirements for any Hawaii-made products, with the exception of milk. There are, however, certain requirements for package labels for the wholesale and retail markets. For example, on the export bag-tag just developed, the weight of the bag had to be put in letters no smaller than 1/2 inch. Check with this helpful department before you spend a lot of money on your taro burger box package design.

Transporting Corms From the Big Island for Planting is Illegal

With all the recent interest in planting taro, make sure that you don't create a problem for yourself or others because you transported taro corms which had the taro root aphid on them. There are taro patches in the Hilo area and elsewhere that have this little white bug in them and if you spread this pest off island you could be in trouble with the authorities, not just your neighbors. Larry Nakahara (548-7175), Manager, Department of Agriculture's Plant Quarantine, says that it is illegal (unless otherwise specified) to transport taros from the Big Island to any other island because of the taro root aphid. Title 4, Subtitle 6, Chapter 72, 4-72-8 of Plant and Non-Domestic Animal Quarantine Plant Intrastate Rules states:

Restrictions on dasheen and taro corms. Transportation of dasheen and taro corms are prohibited from an infected island [Big Island] to a restricted island for taro root aphid except:

(1) Taro corms consigned to a poi factory or other food processing plant;
(2) Dasheen and taro corms consigned to produce wholesalers, supermarkets, retail food stores, and restaurants;
(3) Taro corms verified as wetland taro; and
(4) Taro consigned to individuals for food preparation with the corm's "huli" removed. [Effective July 13, 1981].

Call extension agent, Dwight Sato (955-9155) on the Big Island for more information on how to handle this troublesome pest.

Loan Information

Looking to start or expand your farm? Well, you may want to call the good folks at the Department of Agriculture to see if they can help you out. Koji Yatogo says, agricultural loans are available to qualified new and established farmers through the Hawaii Department of Agriculture's Loan Program. For more information call: Oahu (548-7126), Hilo (961-7446), Kona (323- 2608) and from Kauai and Maui Counties 1-800-GOV-4644 (toll free).

Other loan opportunities and help may also be available through the Department of Business and Economic Development, Alu Like, Office of Hawaiian Affairs, and county economic development offices, to name a few—check your phone book for the nearest office or call your county extension office for some help.

Taro Primer

Would you like to give your kids a beautiful childrens' book about taro production and poi making? Then you may want to buy: **A Trip to the Taro Patch.** This 25 page color book is available from the: Kauai Economic Opportunity Headstart Program, at P.O. Box 1027, Lihue, Kauai 96766 for $7.00. This price includes postage and handling. Their phone number on Kauai is 245-4077.

Benefits of the 1990 Census

When you were filling out the 1990 census, you might have noticed that there was an opportunity for people to identify their ethnic background. This data will be very important to farmers and shippers in Hawaii who wish to cater to certain ethnic groups located on the Mainland. A 1988 pamphlet published about the 1980 census notes that the states with the biggest Asian and Pacific Islander populations are California (35% of total state population), Hawaii (16%), New York (9%), Illinois (5%) and Texas (4%). For this years' study it will be interesting to note how the 20,000 or so immigrants coming to the U.S. every year from each Asian country, changes the state by state ethnic mix. Once this data is available, you should take the opportunity to make new contacts in the cities where these people reside.

LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE

Like to know how your favorite bill is doing at the Legislature? By calling 548-7777 on Oahu using a touch-tone phone you can find out.

CORRECTIONS

The following are corrections on our last issue of the *Tattler*:

Mamasita's of Maui is a wholesaler of food products and Shelly Glass is the President of that company.

Mitsue Cook-Carlson says her specialty is meeting management and program planning.

What topics should we write about next? -- send your requests to the address below.

For more information please write:
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