

Dean Okimoto, Nalo Farms



The following questions were posed to Dean Okimoto, an expert in Value-Added Products, following a workshop he hosted in the summer of 2012. Questions are specific to Dean's operation, and responses offer insight into his success. Additional insights from Dean Okimoto, and all of our 2012 Master Farmers, can be found on Oahu RC&D's website.

Q. How do you manage weeds and insects on your farm?

A. We manage weeds by pulling them out by hand. No sprays are used for weeds. We manage insects by observing and spraying. Our first action is always organic. Because we are for profit and have over 100 restaurants relying on our supply we will use non organic methods if we really need to.

Q. Where do you get seeds for your vegetables?

A. There are many seed sources available. We suggest you find someone you can work with. Relationships in business are everything.

Q. Do you use a specific crop rotation to help manage fertility and / or disease? What other ways do you manage fertility and disease?

A. Yes, we have implemented a crop rotation. Our crop rotation is specific to what we grow. There are many classes offered to farmers to help to manage disease. We don't have problems with fertility.



A worker in the background is pulling out weeds by hand. No sprays are used to manage weeds on Nalo Farms.

Q. What are your post-harvest handling protocols to keep your vegetables fresh?

A. Our processing facility is the key to our post-harvest handling protocols. Keeping our vegetables fresh start with good agricultural practices (GAP) and hazard analysis critical control points (HACCP).

Q. At the workshop, you showed us your processing center and explained that it is used only a couple days each week. Would it be possible to rent your facility to other farmers on the days you aren't using it?

A. It would be ideal to rent to other farmers, however, our equipment is fine-tuned to our product.

Q. How did you finance the processing center: sources of loans, grants, etc?

Hedco, Department of Agriculture Loan, business savings and bank loans financed us.



A processing center is shown above. The facility is run a couple of days each week.

Q. If I want to launch a new value-added product, do you recommend starting with the farmers' markets or marketing to grocery stores, specialty stores, etc.?

A. You start with demographics. Who are your target consumers? We use farmers markets to get feedback from consumers.

Q. What partnerships do you currently have with other growers? How did you identify these partnerships? What kinds of contracts / agreements do you use?

A. A simple verbal agreement is made with other growers. In hindsight it would have been better to start with a contract.

Q. What partnerships do you currently have with restaurants? How did you identify these partnerships? What kinds of contracts / agreements do you use?

A. We don't have any contracts with restaurants. We have to prove our worth to them every day. Our product must meet our restaurant's needs.

Q. What impacts do changes in production (due to season, disease, etc.) have on marketing your product? Cash flow? Labor needs? How do you plan for and manage these variables?

A. We have been doing this since the 80's and have developed a sense and can plan for changes in the season. We don't change our marketing according to season. Our cash flow is only affected if our product is ruined by bad weather. Insurance helps in this type of circumstance. Labor needs are consistent. We still work in bad weather and continue to run our business and do what we can. Farming is not any easy task. However, we have learned ways to help protect our crops and be consistent to our customers.

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