

**WELCOMING ADDRESS:  
TAKING TARO INTO THE 1990s: A TARO CONFERENCE**

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**Recognition of Organizers and Supporters**

These kinds of workshops or conferences do not just happen. Many individuals worked very hard so that this conference is in fact occurring. In particular, I wish to recognize a number of people such as Dwight Sato who initially conceived of this gathering and Jim Hollyer who worked very closely with Dwight in creating this conference. Of course, all of this would not have occurred without the blessing and support of the county administrator--Dr. Mike Nagao. There are also many faculty from our college and the U. H. Hilo College of Agriculture who are on the program along with members from the private sector. You will hear from these individuals as the day progresses. I also acknowledge the interest and support offered by the Governor's Agriculture Coordinating Committee both Mr. Takamine and Mr. Doi. Lastly, I recognize my administrative colleague, Dr. Kenneth Rohrbach, who has been understanding and supportive of the interests in taro.

I thank the Hawaii Dryland Taro Association for co-sponsoring this conference. And, I gratefully acknowledge Congressman Akaka and Senator Inouye for their support of the Agricultural Diversification project that provides the financial resources for this conference.

**College Perspective**

You might be asking what is the college's role in supporting a conference of this type. I point out to you that a general goal of the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) is to support diversified agriculture. And, we believe we will have been successful in meeting this goal if we either create some new agricultural industries or expand some existing ones. Of course, this implies that these industries or expansions are profitable.

We pursue this goal subject to a number of constraints. The most prominent of which is that we must maintain the quality of our environment. Another important constraint is that must be consistent with the state's policies and goals--in other words, reflect the desires of our communities and the individuals who reside in them.

The mechanism that we pursue in supporting diversified agriculture in this sense is to create situations where each person/agency can do what they do best. In other words, we believe that we must have very strong linkages between the various public sector agencies, including CTAHR, and the private sector (producers, marketers, and consumers). In addition, we feel that we must be looking at concepts such as added value, linkages to tourism, and developing as many end products as possible from a particular agricultural commodity. It is within this overall context of a mechanism that we pursue our support of diversified agriculture.

**Taro as a Flagship Crop/Product/Industry**

While I like the products that come from taro ranging from the traditional poi to the less traditional taro chip and other manufactured products, we should not forget that taro is clearly culturally important to Hawaii. Also, I see some very clear linkages, some of which are potentially strong, to link taro production/marketing/consumption to our tourist industry.

I think, also, that taro has much potential in terms of processed and fresh products. We are limited only by our imagination and creativity. Finally, I think that taro can and is consistent with maintaining a fragile ecosystem within the state of Hawaii.

Given the above, I believe that taro is, in fact, an industry with considerable expansion potential. And, the way in which we attempt to do so could serve as a very important model to follow as we try to expand and/or create new agricultural industries in Hawaii.

**Commitment**

I believe that we can only be successful if we make a commitment that we are in this venture (adventure?) together. I believe that it is extremely important that we take the view it's US (all of us in Hawaii) against the world not US against each other. As conflicts arise, and I'm sure they will, I believe that it is extremely important that we keep this idea in front of us and in sharp focus.

With this focus, it is clear that we must maintain a high quality of product if we are to compete in mainland or international markets. We must work very closely with our shippers and distributors. We must establish our marketing contacts now and maintain them. We must recognize that while we do have a high quality product, we also have some very stiff competition from places like the Dominican Republic and Florida. We must realize that in order to be competitive, we must look at the most efficient ways of shipping, packaging, providing corms in sizes desired by marketers, and provide promotional materials such as brochures, labels, recipes. We must also recognize that in order to be successful as an industry, we need to promote the industry and this will likely involve an assessment of producers in order to support marketing activities.

While I believe that those of us in the college can play an important coordinative role, we must clearly make a commitment that together we are expanding the taro industry in Hawaii. We all need to take ownership of what we are doing and to support the total effort even if some of our personal short-term gains may have to be sacrificed. For example, we are producing a marketing handbook and production handbook. We need two things from the industry in order to complete these products. First, we need response from the industry to these surveys. Secondly, we need your financial support to print these handbooks. Again, it's not so much requiring your financial support to print it, but rather for you to take ownership of it. I believe that ownership is best accomplished when a commitment is made. Therefore, we will be asking you to take ownership either by helping pay the printing bill for these handbooks and/or to provide some mechanism for recapturing some of the costs of printing.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I note that you will receive a lot of information today. This information, however, will not be useful in expanding the taro industry in Hawaii unless all of us make the commitment that we are in this venture together. If we take steps to create this feeling on being on the same team, the conference will have been successful.

Thank you and best wishes for a successful conference.

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