

75. Taro Dream: Taro Products, Hamakua 8/00-10/01

Pamala Day's daughter was born with an inability to assimilate any normal infant foods. For her daughter to grow normally, Day realized that she would have to think "outside the box."



Knowing that taro is a hypoallergenic, easily digestible food, she began creating mixtures that her daughter not only could tolerate but tasted good and provided the nutrition her daughter needed. The result was an exotic, creamy, probiotic pudding blend that her daughter ate willingly. As her daughter grew into adulthood with none of the problems that were predicted, people who heard the story began to ask for some of her product to be sent to other people with food allergies or to people who were too sick to eat. According to a stack of testimonials, the taro product kept patients alive and healthy.



Day requested a grant from RETA-H to permit her to finalize her recipes so that they could be made in quantity and shipped to retirement homes, hospitals, natural food stores and other places where they could help people in trouble. The RETA-H grant, other investments and several years work have moved this product close to the commercialization stage. "RETA-H allows someone without much business experience but who has a great idea to actually keep that idea moving forward to get it to commercialization" says Day. Based on her progress to date, a substantial Biotechnology Program grant was awarded the project which will permit the development of a new, dried form of this product. It will also allow Day to look into the use of vitamins and minerals to enhance the product's health benefits. "The uniqueness of the product has caused a lot of people to tell us to set our goals higher," says Piikalama Boiser, Day's production manager. They plan to diversify into other products such as food for military use, a sports line and other products. With 25% of the population shown to have some kind of digestive problem, the potential for Taro Dream's products is limitless.

76. Maui Pineapple Company: Low Acid Pineapple Hybrid, Maui

In support of diversification of pineapple in Hawai'i, the RETA-H program provided support to the two pineapple companies with proven access to low-acid pineapple cultivars. One of these was the Maui Pineapple Company. The pineapple industry is highly competitive resulting in small profit margins for most of their products. For this reason, any new innovation that can provide a better profit has to be taken advantage of rapidly. Hawai'i pineapple companies have access to low-acid hybrids and are now using former sugar land to expand their production for a rapidly expanding market. For this project, Maui Pineapple Company used RETA-H funds to plant over 60 acres of these popular pineapples. This also created nine new jobs. A separate RETA-H "development" grant covered some of the costs of upgrading a dangerously run-down irrigation system on former sugar land. This permitted Maui Pineapple Company to plant 250 acres of pineapple on former sugar lands that, without the confidence in water availability, they would not have planted. The low acid hybrid pineapple – Hawaiian Gold™ - has continued to be a growth segment for them. Although the low acid pineapple is targeted for the fresh market, 35% of them don't make the quality or production standards. These are canned at their Kahului facility. They continue to look for other ways to increase their profit including new lines of drinks and fresh fruit packs. This project now employs nineteen.



77. Gay & Robinson Sugar: Kaua'i 2/01-12/02

Gay & Robinson (G & R) is one of the two remaining sugar companies in the State and the only one on Kaua'i. G&R currently produces raw sugar, but plans to produce value-added sugar products following the expiration of its marketing contract with C&H in June 2003. RETA-H provided funds for two major projects. The first supported planting and cultivating additional sugar cane on State lands formerly farmed by the defunct Kekaha Sugar Company. By the end of January 2002, 780 acres were planted in Kekaha. The second project involved the growing of Stevia, a natural, high intensity, low-caloric sweetener, that G & R will mix with its sugar to produce a low-calorie sugar. Approximately 11.5 acres were planted in stevia but severe weed problems and pending reevaluation of plant cost halted the planting of new acreage. Based on the possibility to diversify G & R by mixing stevia and sugar, another grant program has provided additional funds to market this new, value-added product of G&R sugar. The company presently employs 314 full-time employees and is one of the few companies in Hawai'i to have hired 50 employees over the last two years.