

By Diana Duff

Farm diversity offers more choices at local markets

Special to West Hawaii Today

With pests cutting into profits on single-crop farms, many farmers are starting to diversify. By growing a variety of crops, farmers can harvest throughout the year and, if pests get one crop, they'll have others to rely on. Diversifying may require new skills and tasks, but the results benefit farmers and consumers.

Crop diversity gives farmers a chance to try new crops and get creative with value-added products. For customers who want to buy local, this diversity increases choices.

Just over six years ago, the Kona County Farm Bureau opened a market to help its farmer members offer local produce directly to the community. The Saturday Farmers Market at Keauhou Shopping Center remains one of the largest and busiest markets serving West Hawaii. Everything at the market is sold by Farm Bureau members who either grow their produce and sell it fresh or use local produce to create products. From 8 a.m. to noon every Saturday, the market offers choices from 30 farms. Shoppers can also find booths selling ready-to-eat food, including spring rolls and sausage sandwiches.

Several Saturday vendors use farm-grown cacao to make chocolate products. Doug Pittman crafts homemade products using his macadamias and basil. Sara Moore and Brad Hunter offer fresh local beef and fish for those shopping for animal protein. Ten coffee farmers offer tastings of their 100 percent Kona coffee. Choose your favorite, knowing the flavor is based on the microclimate in which it grows, as well as the farmers' processing methods.

The South Kona Green Market is open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sundays. The market will soon move back to its original location at Amy B.H. Greenwell Ethnobotanical Garden. In the interim, it can be found above the Kealakekua Ranch Center.

Tim Bruno and Karen Kriebel manage the Sunday market that features more than 20 farmers and craft vendors. They sell Luana Naturals beauty products and coffee from their Honaunau farm. The Lotus Cafe offers prepared food at this market, as well as at the Saturday venue. It specializes in Southeast Asian food using local, organic ingredients. The One Day Cafe offers prepared food, including quiches and cookies. Lilikoi Farm often has a Sunday booth selling seasonal crops. Healing products are also available from The Sanctuary of Mana Kea Gardens and D. Medicine Woman.

The market is gearing up for a busy holiday season. Its annual “Feast in the Field” potluck will be held on the Sunday before Thanksgiving and Green Sunday will follow Thanksgiving promoting “Buy Local for the Holidays.”

Wednesdays offer two opportunities to get local products. The Hooulu Community Farmers Market is open from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. with more than 40 vendors offering everything from fresh baked bread to found-glass jewelry. On Nov. 7, it will move from the Keauhou Beach Resort to the Sheraton Kona Resort and Spa at Keauhou Bay. Howie from Lotus Cafe serves food here, joining vendors selling products handcrafted from local woods. Cynthia Hankins offers underwater and volcano photographs at another booth. Local music and the smell of popping kettle corn surround this lively market.

From 3 to 6 p.m. Wednesdays, a market is open at Tropical Edibles Nursery in Captain Cook. The nursery buys produce from local farmers to sell at the market held in its large indoor kitchen. Coffee, macadamia nuts, jams and products made from locally grown ingredients, including lilikoi butter and Kona Origins of Honaunau chocolate bars, are sold at the market. Farm fresh eggs and seasonal fruit are also available. Market patrons may tour the nursery’s herb garden, relax in the meditation garden or buy plants.

With increased opportunities to buy and try local produce, now is a good time to start your “buy local, eat local” program.

Tropical gardener helpline

Lalena asks: We are struggling with ants in our worm bin. I’ve tried several things to get rid of them, but they are still there. What should I do?

Answer: Here are some suggestions from personal experience and the Internet:

1. Keep your bin active and damp. Ants like a dry and static environment. If your bin does not have dry spots and you are in there moving things around every day or two, ants will usually give up and go elsewhere.
2. Clean the outside of your bin to remove any scented trails that will lead ants into your worms. Best to use a lemon-scented window cleaner or ammonia for scent removal. Use a paper towel to spread it rather than spraying, which could harm your worms.
3. Cinnamon will deter ants if you put it across their path.
4. Find out if the ants are attracted to sugar substances or protein by putting these out to see which they prefer. Once you’ve defined their preference, make a bait of either of these with boric acid in it. Boric acid will kill those in the nest when they take it home.
5. Diatomaceous earth can also be spread around to kill ants on contact, but it is only effective when it stays dry.

6. Raising the bin off the ground by putting it on wood or concrete blocks can also help. If you can put these risers in water so they don't touch the sides of the water container and can hold the bin in place, you may be able to discourage ants from coming into your bin and those that are there will either leave or die.

If you have success with these or other methods you create, please let us know so that we can spread the word in future worm classes.

Email plant questions to konamg@ctahr.hawaii.edu for answers by certified master gardeners. Some questions will be chosen for inclusion in this column.

Diana Duff is a plant adviser, educator and consultant with an organic farm in Captain Cook.