

Hawaii Taro

Preliminary estimates of acreage, farm prices, marketings, and farm value.

FREQUENCY: Annual

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Output at record low

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Number of farms, acreage, marketings, price, and value by islands, 1993-97. Monthly taro for poi milling statistics, 1997.

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Historical trends for marketings, farm prices, farm value, and acreage.

Taro imports . . . page 4

Fresh taro import statistics and review of 1997.

The Hawaii Agricultural Statistics Service's preliminary estimate of combined poi and Chinese taro production is 5.2 million pounds for 1997, down 9 percent from 1996's revised output of 5.7 million pounds. Last year's record low harvest boost farm prices to a record high average of 51.0 cents per pound, up 4 percent from 1996. Total farm revenues, however, declined 5 percent to \$2.7 million as the record high farm price could not overcome the decrease in output.

Weather and disease reduces poi taro harvest

Farmers on Kauai, whose fields produce more than 50 percent of the State's taro for poi, were hampered by frequent showers, strong winds, cloudy skies, and cool temperatures for most of the first quarter. The wintery weather slowed crop growth and may have contributed to the emergence of a new disease named Taro Pocket Rot (TPR). This disease is similar to common Pythium soft rot except the infected tissue is walled off, thus forming a "pocket" in the taro corm and rendering it undesirable for the making of poi. TPR became widespread when initial control was hampered by an uncertainty as to which causal agents were involved. As a result, supplies of taro for poi remained low for several months. Yields on Kauai began to improve later in the year due to improved weather conditions and suggested changes in cultural practices to deal with TPR.

Because of the relatively low supply of taro for poi, farm prices averaged a record high 51.5 cents per pound during 1997, up 4 percent from the previous year. Poi taro acreage climbed to an 18-year high of 370 acres in 1997. The 6 percent gain in acreage from last year is mainly due to a boost from the Big Island.

Chinese taro acreage and output continue to decline

Fresh taro sales, primarily composed of Chinese taro, decreased 20 percent in 1997 to 400,000 pounds. This was the third consecutive year of decline and the lowest total since 1984. Dry weather was mainly responsible for the initial declines, but the taro root aphid has become a major concern last year. Extensive damage is usually associated with dry weather and this aphid is one of the most destructive pests for Chinese taro. The aphids reduce plant vigor, yield, and quality by sucking sap from the plant's roots.

Farm prices increased 3 percent due to the declining production, but it was below the record high price of 47.4 cents per pound received in 1995. In 1997, total area in Chinese taro was estimated at 80 acres, down 56 percent from the previous season. Adverse weather, the aphid, and erratic farm prices have resulted in a steady decline in Chinese taro acreage and production as farmers switched to alternative crops.



Hawaii Agricultural Statistics Service

Fact finding for agriculture

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1997 Hawaii taro statistics

TARO: Number of farms, acreage, marketings, price, and value, by islands, 1993-97

Year	Farms	Acreage in crop ¹			Marketings			Farm price			Value of sales
		Poi taro	Chinese taro	Total	Fresh	Processed	Total	Poi taro	Chinese taro	All	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Acres</i>			<i>1,000 pounds</i>			<i>Cents per pound</i>			<i>\$1,000</i>
STATE											
1993	190	295	215	510	1,000	5,000	6,000	47.6	40.2	46.0	2,760
1994	180	310	180	490	1,200	4,900	6,100	48.3	38.9	46.0	2,806
1995	190	350	200	550	800	6,000	6,800	48.1	47.4	48.0	3,264
1996	180	350	180	530	500	5,200	5,700	49.6	45.8	49.0	2,793
1997	160	370	80	450	400	4,800	5,200	51.5	47.0	51.0	2,652
HAWAII											
1993	110	45	180	225	960	830	1,790	44.9	40.3	41.8	748
1994	105	45	170	215	1,200	760	1,960	44.8	38.9	40.3	790
1995	109	65	190	255	790	610	1,400	46.2	47.2	46.9	657
1996	100	60	170	230	490	910	1,400	56.0	44.7	49.2	689
1997	85	80	70	150	390	910	1,300	60.0	46.3	53.8	699
KAUAI											
1993	52	195	²	195	*	3,330	3,330	47.0	³	47.0	1,565
1994	50	200	²	200	*	3,160	3,160	47.9	³	47.9	1,514
1995	52	210	²	210	*	4,160	4,160	48.0	³	48.0	1,997
1996	54	210	5	215	*	3,200	3,200	48.0	³	48.0	1,536
1997	50	210	5	215	*	3,000	3,000	50.1	3	50.1	1,503
MAUI/MOLOKAI/OAHU ⁴											
1993	28	55	35	90	40	840	880	50.8	38.9	50.8	447
1994	25	65	10	75	*	980	980	51.3	40.0	51.2	502
1995	29	75	10	85	10	1,230	1,240	49.1	64.0	49.2	610
1996	26	80	5	85	10	1,090	1,100	51.1	61.2	51.6	568
1997	25	80	5	85	10	890	900	49.5	90.0	50.0	450

¹ Survey conducted in November of each year. Does not include acreage used primarily for leaf production.

² Kauai combined with Maui, Molokai, and Oahu to avoid disclosure of individual operations.

³ Not shown separately but accounted for in State average.

⁴ Oahu combined with Maui and Molokai to avoid disclosure of individual operations.

* = Less than 5,000 pounds.

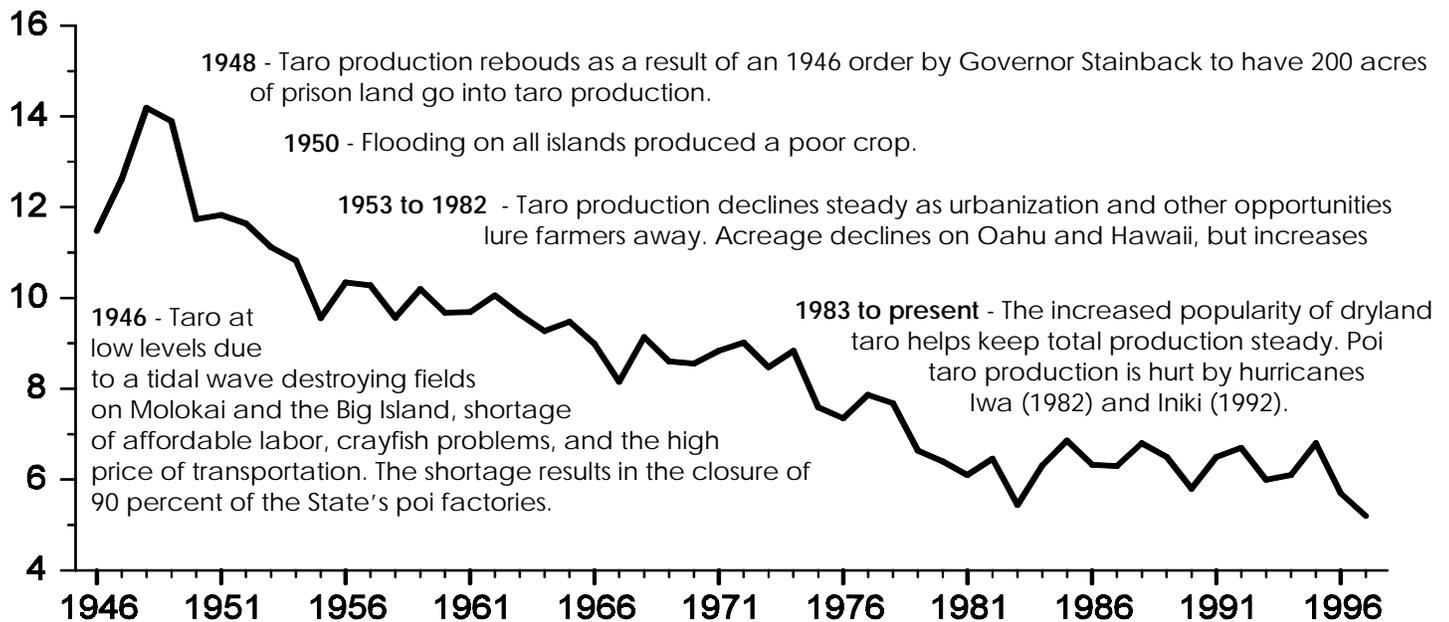
Monthly Taro For Poi Millings: State of Hawaii, 1991-95 average, 1995, and 1996.

Year	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
<i>1,000 pounds</i>													
5-year average	408	402	407	414	410	411	446	369	451	471	457	475	5,121
1995	450	440	490	440	460	480	470	510	500	510	510	540	5,800
1996 ¹	490	480	450	420	380	340	360	370	370	460	410	470	5,000

¹ Preliminary.

Hawaii taro marketings, 1946-97

Millions of pounds

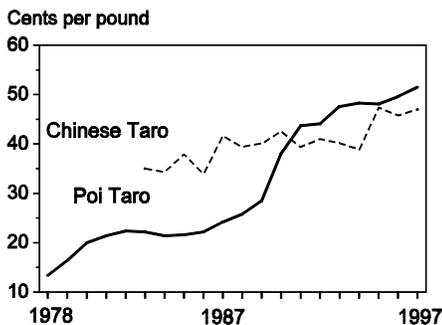


Hawaii Agricultural Statistics Service, 1998

Selected historical notes taken from "A Brief History of Taro in Hawaii", Taro Industry Analysis Number 4, November 1990.

Other Hawaii taro trends

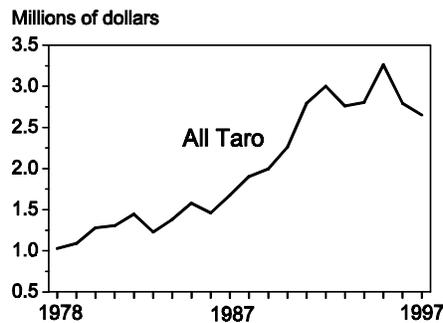
Farm prices



Average farm prices for poi taro have steadily risen since 1986. Not surprisingly, the steepest gain was made in 1990 when production fell to a then all time low of 5.2 million pounds due to unusually wet weather.

Chinese taro farm prices have fluctuated more widely than poi taro farm prices, but the overall trend is upward. The period of relatively low prices during 1991-93 coincided with relatively high production levels.

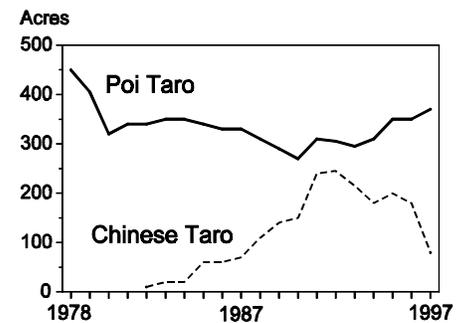
Farm value



The steady growth in farm prices of poi taro and Chinese taro resulted in a similar upward trend in farm value. The peak came in 1995 at \$3.3 million dollars and made taro one of the State's top 10 diversified crops.

The decline in farm revenues during the past two years is due to a decline in output as the overall farm price were at record levels.

Total acreage in crop



After years of continual decline, poi taro acreage began to stabilize in 1981. Unusually wet weather, followed by Hurricane Iniki's direct hit on Kauai's fields in 1992, setback poi taro acreage from the late-80s through the mid-90s.

In a brief 11-year span beginning with 1982, Chinese taro acreage expanded from 10 acres to 245 acres. More recently, adverse weather and disease have resulted in a decline of acreage.

Taro imports

Hawaii imported 493,000 pounds of taro in 1997, up 1 percent from 1996. Fiji remained the main source of imported taro with a total of 442,000 pounds or 90 percent of the total. The Cook Islands were a distant second with 45,000 pounds.

The remaining countries that supplied taro to Hawaii in 1997 were: Thailand (3,000 pounds), Costa Rica (2,000 pounds), Canada (1,000 pounds), Guam (40 pounds), and Vanuatu (25 pounds) in Oceania.

Fresh taro imports by source, State of Hawaii, 1990-97

Source	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
<i>1,000 pounds</i>								
Foreign:								
Samoa	405	674	284	718	19	0	0	0
Fiji	39	0	309	13	522	358	422	442
Cook Islands	0	0	0	0	160	111	48	45
Tonga	315	83	0	0	0	0	19	0
Guam	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	*
Vanuatu	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	*
Thailand	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Costa Rica	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Canada	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
U.S. mainland	14	0	0	9	0	0	0	0
Total	773	757	593	740	701	469	489	493

* = Less than 1,000 pounds.

Source of data: Market News Branch, Hawaii Department of Agriculture.

Fresh taro imports by months, State of Hawaii, 1996-1997.

Year	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Total
<i>1,000 pounds</i>													
1996	17	21	36	40	42	49	53	48	67	13	28	75	489
1997	39	28	46	46	66	44	39	21	25	41	37	51	493

Source of data: Market News Branch, Hawaii Department of Agriculture.

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