


Dean J. Okimoto..



PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

My name is Dean Okimoto and I am best known for helping to create a culture between restaurants and farmers of buying local and promoting fresh local products in many of Hawaii's best restaurants. Founder and owner of Nalo Farms, Inc., for over 35 years. At its peak, Nalo Farms serviced over 100 restaurants, hotels and markets doing gross sales of over \$2 million per year on 16 acres of land in Waimanalo. Nalo Farms serviced some of Hawaii's finest chefs like Roy Yamaguchi, Alan Wong, Peter Merriman, Russell Siu, Hiroshi Fukui, and many more. They all, as well as many others helped to establish a culture of buying local and promoting farmers by branding them on their menus. It all started with a conversation with Roy Yamaguchi putting Nalo Greens on their menu and many farmers have benefitted by this type of branding.

The Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation elected me as President in 2003 and I served for 11 years. In that time, I was able to start Farmers Markets. The first being the Kapiolani Community College Farmers Market. With the help of foodwriter Joan Namkoong, and Conrad Nonaka, an administrator at KCC, we launched the first Farmers Market in Hawaii. We subsequently started markets in Kailua, Mililani, and Blaisdell Center in the heart of Honolulu. These markets provided a venue for farmers to personally meet the public and for the public to realize the freshness and quality of what our local farms could produce. These markets have also made it possible for the Farm Bureau to survive as the revenue generated from the markets provided enough revenue so that farmers did not have to pay an increased membership cost. At the Legislature, we were able to pass the Important Ag Lands bill in 2007 which set the stage for preserving ag lands in the future. It was passed with the caveat that it would need fixing in the future. We also passed a bill so that farmers did not have to get building permits for structures under 20,000 sq. ft, as long as it was for greenhouses, processing facilities, or auxiliary ag building.

The Hawaii Agricultural Foundation of which I am the chair, for the last 10 years has been an advocate for Agriculture helping farmers with marketing and new technology. With the help of our Executive Director, Denise Yamaguchi, we have programs across the spectrum of the community. We help help farmers navigate the plethora of rules, we also want to grow new farmers, educate our keiki about appreciating what Ag does as well as having them experience farming first hand and also putting on forums with Eat, Think, Drink, to educate the public about the challenges and new innovations that can help Ag become more successful. We have even helped to bridge the gap between different growing methods, whether it be Biotech, organic and conventional Ag. We need all of it to feed our people.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

There were TV experiences on Let's Go Fishing, Hawaii Cooks, and many news broadcasts relating to the effects of weather on Ag, presenting local grown products and answering questions on Ag challenges. On radio, I was co-host for 2 years with Jo McGarry on 1420 AM promoting local grown products from eggs, vegetables, beef, pork, and seafood.

Nalo Farms, Inc. – 1983 – 2018

Starting with 4 acres and expanding to 16 acres, we were a premium branded product producing Nalo greens, micro greens, sprouts, and herbs servicing restaurants, Farmers Markets, and supermarkets.

Hawaii, State Farm 2002 – 2014

Honored to represent farms across the State on the state and federal level, monitoring bills at the Legislature and helping to craft bills to promote the growth of the Ag industry.

Tamura's Enterprises – 2018 – 2021

Poke Manager in charge of creating and teaching staff the art of poke making, especially using many of our local caughtfishes especially ahi.

Hawaii Agricultural Foundation – Chairman – 2014 – Present

Promoting the education of our keiki on agriculture. Educating the public on New Ag technology challenges facing ag, and how we can expand this for more of our local ag products. This is through our Eat, Think, Drink forum which is held quarterly.

Educating farmer and helping them market their product, promoting food safety, so that they can expand their markets. Also, introducing Ag technology to them for more efficiency, economic savings, and better utilization of our precious Ag natural resources.

Y Hata Enterprises – 2021 – 2024

Helping the company expand their local product lines that they provide to their customers. Also look at farms to be good agriculture practices certified and food safety modernization Act compliant. There are only about 50 farms out of over 5000 farms that are compliant. If we do not get more farms compliant, they will not have a market in the future, as this is now law, and more buyers will not buy without these protocols.

Hawaii Seafood Council – 2010 – Pres

Being on this board, I have learned about the Hawaii Fishery and how they have instituted practices making it the best practices in the world. The value of having the best, safest, and most sustainable practices in the world makes me proud to be a part of it.

Board of Water Supply Advisory Board – 2011 – Present

The importance of our clean water supply is paramount to sustaining our communities, and ensuring the water needs for agriculture is critical to the survival of agriculture.

Board Member of the Pacific Century Fellows -2004- Present

Advisory Board Member of Leeward Community College Culinary Program 2002 -Present

Career and Technical Educational—Career Pathways curriculum development for DOE, Food systems and agriculture pathway for students from elementary to high school—2012 to present
Shaping curriculum for students interested in pursuing agriculture or food systems, for eventual career pathways.

Nalo Farms, LLC—April, 2024—Present

I have just joined with Jason Brand of Kunia Country Farms to regenerate Nalo Farms in Kunia. We are looking to change the name of the farm to Nalo Farms with the intent of doing aquaponic growing of lettuces. Our 3 tenets are grow locally, grow sustainably, and matching Mainland pricing of lettuce. We hope to do this by growing the farm into a 30 acre aquaponic operation producing 2.5 million pounds of lettuce a year and 2.5 million pounds of tilapia a year. The lettuces will be aimed at replacing lettuces brought in from the Mainland, so in other words, replacement agriculture with the intent to use as little of our natural resources as possible. Our system is recirculating so we do not use water except from rainfall which falls into our bed system. We use solar for our electrical needs, and we preserve the soil for future generations as we build our beds above ground and do not disturb the soil. We have partnered with Mahi Solar to go on their lands in Kunia to prove that agriculture and energy can work synergistically together to provide power and food for Hawaii. With what we plan to grow, we believe we can replace about 6.5% of the imported lettuce market.

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Iolani High School Class of 1972

University of Redlands 1972-1974

University of Hawaii 1975-1976

University of Redlands 1981—Bachelor of Science Degree—Political Science

AWARDS AND HONORS

2001 Cuisines of the Sun – Special Guest Farmer Maunalani Resorts

2001 Award of Excellence Honolulu Magazine Industry Leadership Award Hale Aina

2004 Iolani School Alumni Service Award

2007 Ka Lei Hano Heritage Award. University of Hawaii College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources

2007 Centennial Award – Top100 Allumni University of Redlands

2009 Leadership Award Ho`oulu Award Hawaii institute for Public Affairs HIPA

2017 Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii - The Spirit or Aloha Honoree for Outstanding lep, sustained service, educational support, and volunteerism for our community

2019 Hawaii Restaurant Association Hall of Fame—Local Champion Award