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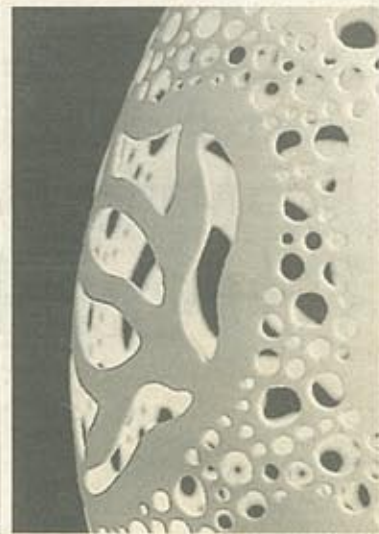
FREE



**Holiday Gift
Guide 8**



**Hilo:
Art Town 13**



Egg-xactly 14

Pescatore 20

Local Grinds

3 months on a Hawai'i-only diet

6

Real Local Grinds

Three months on a Hawai'i Island-only diet

by Andrea Dean

Bagels. Pizza. Ice Cream. Lasagna. These were the things that I greedily consumed in the weeks before I started eating only locally grown foods. Some primitive part of my brain was preparing for what I perceived as future deprivation. I had been researching the issue of Hawai'i's near total dependence upon imported fuel and food and had been proselytizing food sustainability to anyone who would listen, when it occurred to me that I did not know if even one person, let alone the entire island, could survive on locally grown foods.

For three months, 100 percent of the food I ate was grown on Hawai'i Island. This meant food grown here, not just *made* here. No tofu; the soybeans are imported. No bread; the wheat is imported. No guava jam; the sugar is imported. I did not even allow myself off-island condiments; that's right, no soyu. The food had to come out of the land or sea right here. Locally grown beef, pork and poultry would be fine for others, but I am a fish eating "vegetarian."

Love and fear

Conversations about island sustainability have been held for as long as it has been lost. Why? Isn't life easier now that we can buy whatever we want, whenever we want?

Many decisions are made based on either love or fear. I do not love gardening, but I fear being without food. Fear is, and always has been, a legitimate motivator for basic survival. Pre-contact Hawaiians had food self-sufficiency and were models of sustainable agriculture. Being a matter of survival, food production was a top priority for the Hawaiians, and society was organized for maximum food production.

Today, our survival does not appear to be immediately in peril. We have no compelling reason to change our habits or community struc-

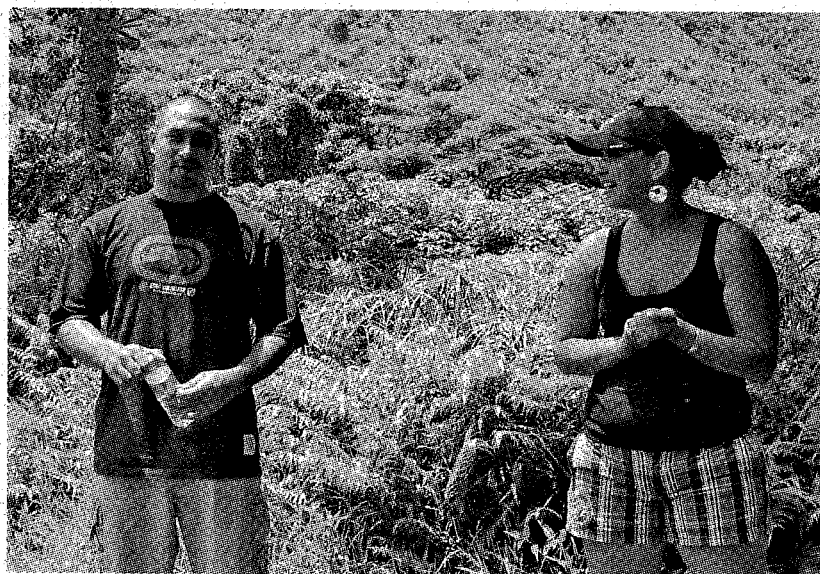
ture with regards to how we obtain food. However, the global backdrops of unstable fuel prices, war, and natural disaster have been the catalyst for renewed enthusiasm around the linked issues of fuel and food self-sufficiency.

Food production in the United States depends heavily on the use of fossil fuel. Many are also concerned about the impact of GMO foods; corporate ownership of seeds; food safety; environmental degradation caused by factory farming; depletion of the oceans; the nutritional quality of imported foods; pesticide residues; and the treatment of farm and food factory workers. These are all legitimate reasons for beginning to create a safe, sustainable and consistent food supply.

Here in Hawai'i, the reason most often cited for pursuing food self-sufficiency is the "if the ships stop coming" scenario. We import the majority of the food we eat and the inputs (fuel, fertilizer, feed) that we use to grow food locally; we are in a triple bind with respect to food self-sufficiency, food security, and food sustainability. This beyond simply reducing imports and growing more food. Food sustainability solutions must include strategies to develop alternative transportation fuels, encourage alternative electrical generation on farms, and develop viable fertilizer and feed products.

The wild 'ulu

Like most folks, I am very busy. I have a job, do volunteer work, have a husband and a 14-year-old son, and receive way too much e-mail every day. I live in North Kohala and wanted to get my food from as close to home as possible. I did not want to waste time or fuel driving all over the island in search of food, but would purchase and gather wherever I went. My work often takes me to Hilo, and I drive my son to school in Waimea, so I shopped primarily in Hawi, Waimea and Hilo.



Kalea and Kanani Mock-Chew at their taro farm in Waipi'o Valley.

I spent the weeks prior to beginning my experiment by tracking down sources for all of the items needed for a balanced and enjoyable diet: fruits, vegetables, starches, proteins (fish, eggs, cheese, nuts, legumes), dairy, and those two things so overused in the typical American diet: fat and salt. Sage Farms, which sells produce under the Banyan Tree in Hawi, and Kekela Farms, on Mana Road in Waimea, were my primary sources for vegetables. Fresh citrus, tropical fruit, coconuts, cassava and a myriad other tropical treats were obtained from Uluwehi Farms in Hawi.

It was also easy to find Hawai'i Island produce at KTA and Foodland in Waimea. I needed some form of fat for cooking and dressings. An advertisement in the *Hawai'i Island Journal* led me to South Kona Mac Nuts, the only source of oil that is grown and processed on Hawai'i Island. Sea salt is still made in the traditional Hawaiian way on Kaua'i but not here. I got Kona Pure™ sea salt, which is made at the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawai'i Authority (NELHA) as a by-product of deep sea water bottling, from Savers LTD. I dried and ground up some fresh herbs from my garden and mixed it with the sea salt to make my own herbed salt mixture.

My primary starches were some of the Hawaiian canoe plants — the plants that the Polynesians deemed essential for survival and brought to Hawai'i in their voyaging canoes: kalo (taro), 'uala (sweet potato), 'ulu (breadfruit) and mai'a (banana). I also had squash and corn. All of the Okinawa sweet potatoes in the food stores are from Moloka'i, but I could find locally grown yellow and purple sweet potatoes at the farmers' market in

Hilo. 'Ulu is almost impossible to buy and must be gathered. Usually plentiful, the 'ulu was hard to find, as I was beginning my experiment at the end of the 'ulu season. My primary source was from the trees lining the KTA parking lot in Keauhou!

Poi was available from Kalae Mock-Chew (Mokuwai Piko Poi), if I arrived at 3:00 pm sharp at K.M. Seed in Waimea on Tuesdays and Fridays or 8:00 am sharp under the banyan tree in Hawi. Poi is a scarce commodity, and people line up early. I could buy taro root grown in Waipi'o Valley in Foodland in Waimea, and other locally grown taro at the farmers' market in Hilo. Once I had all of my sources identified, I felt confident that I wouldn't starve.

Domestic arts

Being successful in this endeavor was more about organization than discipline. When you buy only fresh food, these foods must be prepared and processed. Things have to be washed, cut, peeled, boiled, and chopped. At times, I felt like this was a burden in my already over-busy life, but I also learned to appreciate what farmer, essayist and local economy proponent Wendell Berry calls the "domestic arts." To quote from one of his essays, "These arts are as demanding and gratifying, as instructive and pleasing as the so-called 'fine-arts.' To learn them is, I believe, the work that is our profoundest calling. Our reward is that they will enrich our lives and make us glad."

Berry is not referring to just slaving away in the kitchen but to the entire process — from farming, to preparing and preserving, to sharing with friends. Without a doubt, the most enjoyable part of eating locally was the people that I met. I received a lot of

mana'o, seeds to plant, and many unique foods: blueberries, local green tea, turmeric, cassava, corn, jack fruit and black beans, just to name a few.

On Sunday afternoon, and also on Tuesdays or Fridays (my market days), I spent time preparing my food. While boiling taro, the water has to be changed a few times to get rid of the calcium oxalate crystals. I would set the taro pot on the stove first and then change out the water in between preparing the other foods. To make cooking easier and to save electricity, I would pack my oven full of food to roast. Sweet potatoes tossed in mac nut oil and rosemary. Beets (and sometimes carrots) roasted in fresh squeezed orange juice, honey and ginger. Eggplants tossed in mac nut oil, oregano, basil and rosemary (later to be sprinkled with goat cheese). Kabocha squash was cut in half, baked face down on a cookie sheet.

As soon as I got home with the fresh vegetables, I got into the habit of immediately washing and cutting up the lettuce, radishes, carrots, daikon, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and putting the salad bowl in the refrigerator. This reduced the amount of rotting lettuce in the refrigerator and gave us a ready source of food all week. Fruit was cut and tossed in fresh squeezed orange juice and honey, sprinkled with mac nuts and sometimes freshly grated and toasted coconut. Hard boiled island eggs made for a quick snack, and I even made my own mayonnaise with mac nut oil. Island Organics Nutty Leather was a great fruit leather snack when I wanted something sweet. Green beans, kale, chard and other green vegetables, I would steam the night I wanted them. I also made a lot of soups. I usually started by sautéing green onions, green garlic or leeks and then added broccoli, carrots, squash, chard or kale and dasheen (a small Japanese taro that tastes like a potato).

At times, when I was bemoaning the domestic arts (and I was just shopping and preparing, not growing!), I fully

understood the romance that the 1950s housewife had with pre-processed food. Processed foods currently make up three-fourths of total world food sales. But we pay with our lives for this convenience. Processed foods make people overweight and obese, putting them at risk for many other diseases including asthma, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and some forms of cancer.

Committing to a lifestyle

Before I started eating locally, I thought I was a healthy eater but always had a hard time eating the recommended 5-9 servings of fruits and vegetables daily. I am not alone; only one-third of Hawai'i County adults meet this standard. On this island, half of the adult population, and 27 percent of children ages 10-17, are overweight or obese. Just about the time I was starting my eating locally project, the LiveWell program designed by Dr. Terry Shintani, creator of the Hawai'i Diet™, was launched at Five Mountains Hawai'i in Waimea.

"The program was more than a food program, it was a lifestyle commitment," noted Patti Cook, a LiveWell participant. "Dr. Shintani advocates not using processed foods at all but rather buying and preparing food yourself, as native peoples did. The program works because of the spiritual connection that people have to their culture, family and heritage through eating poi, taro, sweet potato, etc..."

Cook lost 30 pounds during the three-week course.

My husband and son did not eat completely local during my experiment, but they greatly increased the percentage of locally grown foods in their diet. My son loved all of the interesting fruits, soups, taro cakes, salads, sweet potatoes, soy beans, goat cheese, and fish. Unbeknownst to me, my husband and son had been restraining themselves for my benefit, but after two months they declared that they couldn't take the deprivation any longer and pulled out all the stops. My son baked a vanilla cake filled with a lemon-custard cream and frosted with a chocolate ganache. My husband baked three fresh loaves of bread.

Was the smell of fresh baked bread wafting through the house a moral challenge for me? Only momentarily. It's not like I was on a diet. I had been eating plenty and had my share of desserts as well. It's amazing what you can do with eggs and

milk, and I frequently made custard and custard variations. Fresh pumpkin and/or banana mixed with freshly grated ginger, honey, eggs and milk made a great pie. I did some crust experiments with taro and sweet potato. I acquired whole vanilla beans at the Hawaiian Vanilla Company, and this added a new dimension to my custards.

Nancy Redfeather and Gerry Herbert of Kawanui Farm grow 80 percent of their own food and sell the surplus to three other families. On one acre, they grow 25 varieties of vegetables, 65 different varieties of fruits, nuts, spices and berries, 12 varieties of coffee, 7 different beans, corn — and they have ducks. When I joined them for lunch. Nancy made an unbelievable duck egg omelet with seven different vegetables and a big salad with avocado-lemon dressing. I had not eaten any grains for over a month and was treated to corn bread, made from local corn dried on the stalk and ground, plus local eggs and milk. Nancy made the cornbread, and we topped it off with creamy Volcano Island Honey. When I left, Nancy and Gerry gave me some black turtle beans to take home for seed and eating.

The home farm is a critical component of island food self-sufficiency. Think of recasting the WWII era Victory Garden into the Hawai'i Garden of Good Grinds. Start with planting 'uala, 'ulu, and dryland taro in the yard, for a low-maintenance source of staples.

I now know that it is possible to survive and thrive on the food that is grown here. Eating exclusively locally grown food required me to differentiate between my needs and my wants, but as long as I was willing to alter my food preferences, there was plenty to eat. I lost weight, reduced the amount of trash I put in the landfill, contributed to the local economy, made a lot of new friends and have begun to plant my own sustainable homestead with the help of some of my new friends.

Planting a seed

The high cost of land, labor and imported inputs (fuel, electricity, feed, fertilizer, pesticides) makes it difficult for Hawai'i's farmers to produce food that is priced com-



PHOTO BY TERRY WARNER

petitively with what is produced on factory farms and imported from the U.S. mainland or foreign countries. A number of Hawai'i's farmers have become niche producers and agro-tourist destinations in order to make a living off the land.

Hawai'i Island leaders were at least somewhat successful in guiding the transition from sugar to diversified agriculture, although much more could be done, and this experience can be applied towards increasing self-sufficiency. Tax credits, tax structure, preservation of agricultural land, further development of local markets, grants, zoning and other innovative solutions must play a role in making the transition to an economic reality that supports the local sustainable production of food for local mass consumption.

During the course of my experiment, I spoke with many people in agriculture, education, government, business, economic development and health care who are seriously and passionately interested in island food self-sufficiency. It was downright inspiring, really. It's amazing what happens when you plant a seed. ■

This article is excerpted from "Locally Grown, From the Inside Out." The complete article is available at andreadean.com. The author wishes to thank the many contributors to this project, some who provided access to their intellect, and others who supplied fresh fruits and vegetables from their farms and gardens.

On the Web Totally local recipes

For recipes the author developed using local ingredients exclusively, visit hawaiiislandjournal.com.



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Denise Nakanishi
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HOLIDAY HOUSE HUNTING

It's that time of year again! It's time to remind sellers that, especially in Hawaii, property does, in fact, sell during the holidays. Conventional wisdom would indicate that the holiday season would be the worst time to sell. In Hawaii, however, this just doesn't hold true. While homes sales in the rest of the nation lag during the holidays, here in Hawaii, the period between Thanksgiving and New Years is possibly our heaviest selling season. Wanna know who looks at property during the holiday season? Buyers, not lookers! It makes perfect sense. Because so many of our buyers are traveling from off-island, they tend to combine their buying trip with their holiday break. Local buyers usually have extra time off during the holidays as well. You can bet the ones who take time out during this hectic time are very serious. If selling your home is on your "to do" list for 2007, you may want to back your time table up a bit! After all, think of how much nicer your home will show with the holiday decorations. Take time to bake those holiday cookies; that "homey" smell helps create a sense of nostalgia. It's a great "staging" opportunity. It helps mentally "move" a buyer into the home, which exactly where you want them to be during this busy selling season...but a word of caution to buyers; be very careful that your Christmas shopping does not give you a "holiday hangover." Just \$100 of additional credit card debt per month will impact the amount of mortgage you can qualify for by over \$15,000! Don't forget new debt or credit inquiries could negatively affect your credit score as well. So shop 'til you drop, but don't forget to book time with your REALTOR®. It's been another banner year in real estate. Prices have stabilized, inventory is good and interest rates remain low. For these reasons, the market should remain strong into 2007 as well. So, whether buying or selling, your agent will be happy to assist with your real estate needs. Give us a chance to "wrap up" your transaction in time for Christmas! Happy Holidays!



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