

# Ko Farms Video Transcript

[Music Playing]

My name is Dan Ko, and I'm the owner of Ko Farms. We've been farming for about 35 years.

And, I started with a small farm in Hawaii Kai. We were growing bananas. And, that was the first time that I had interaction with Down to Earth.

And, I started marketing our bananas to the King Street store.

[Music Playing]

Our farm is 2.2 acres. And, one of the things that really impressed me about working with Down to Earth, and then also providing local produce, is that they value high-quality organic produce.

And so, we've moved from bananas to salad mix. And now we're doing a host of greens: kale, collards, dino kale...

We do mint and a few other herbs-- and also some baby bok choy (which is one of our new premier crops).

Yeah, so my background is in soil conservation. I worked with the Department of Agriculture for about 13 years.

And, one of the values that we have is-- (obviously) keeping cover on all of our bare spots.

So, we're in a hilly area (high rainfall). So, erosion control is one of our...one of the values that we have.

Well, we're also into really sustainable practices-- as far as using compost and mulches from local sources.

So, a lot of the fertilizers, and the soil fertility that we use comes from locally produced compost and manures.

We're also into minimizing our impact on the environment by reducing the use of any kind of (you know) fungicides or insecticides. Everything we do...

We're the first certified organic farm on Oahu. And so, we've kind of had those values.

And, the reason that we have it is because I raised my children (at five kids) on the farm, and I didn't want them to be exposed to those kind of chemicals.

And so, we decided to make a change early on that we would follow organic practices (become certified).

And then, it really fits in well with what Down to Earth is trying to do.

And then, I think what the customers want-- is they want highest quality produce at an affordable price.

[Music Playing]

Well, one of the things that's important (I think) for local farmers is that they have a steady clientele. I mean-- a lot of our produce--we're competing not with local farmers (here in Hawaii), but we're really compete competing with the west coast. And so, the West Coast can offer quality produce at a cheaper price.

But, of course, you have the freshness. And, I think that's where the local community has cornered the market on this.

A lot of our product-- we try to get it from our farm to the shelf at Down to Earth before 24 hours has elapsed.

So, that's one of the values that we have.

We have our team out here early in the morning packing, and we try to deliver by midday.

So, that there's absolute freshness.

And, that helps to preserve the quality of the crops-- because... (you know) there's a lot of shrinkage.

The mainland shrinkage is pretty high-- but I think the local produce is low.

And, of course, there's other reasons of just economic viability.

Every dollar that's generated and stays in Hawaii helps to generate you know numerous jobs in the community-- and that's important to me. We have vendors that we get paper products, different kind of packaging products, and then the people that use our products as well.

So, I think staying in Hawaii (grown in Hawaii) that's important for everybody.

So, when we first started (and this was back in the early 80s even late 70s early 80s),

I had a banana farm, and it was just a small farm (maybe about an acre).

And, I was in high school. I didn't really know what I was doing-- and so I walked in.

I called Down to Earth-- and this was the King Street location. And, I asked him if they were interested in buying some produce and bananas.

They said "bring it by"-- so I (not knowing better)-- I brought the whole bunch in.

And, they said "Oh, we really need them in a box". [Laughing]

And, so they gave me a knife, and let me cut them out in the... in the back and then bring them in. But... I was basically just developing a relationship with the produce manager at the time.

And then slowly growing from bananas to... we did solid mix with Down to Earth.

And then, growing into where we are now. And so, it really was a great relationship.

I think for somebody who didn't know a lot at the time-- to be able to work with a company that was providing produce-- it made it the transition really easy to go from just small-scale to a little bit bigger scale.

At one point, we had about 20 acres, and we were providing many different selections for Down to Earth.

So, I've raised all my kids on our farm in the back of this valley.

We've been here for over 30 years, and now I have five grand-kids.

And my hope is that one of my kids will come back and take over the farm.

And, that my grand-kids will also have this experience.

But really looking towards the future-- and the future for a lot of young people in Hawaii is that... I think we can change our paradigm on thinking that we need to expand and have these big acreages in order to be economically viable.

I think if we look at the trend that's going on with some of the leaders in agriculture, we'll find that there is a trend to be more intensive, and have less extensive or bigger farms.

In other words, the trend is to have a smaller farm that's more concise, easier to manage, and also economically viable.

And so, I think we're gonna see that transition. You know, Hawaii's sometimes slow... to adopt these things, but I think we're gonna see this transition to intensive agriculture move to Hawaii-- where people can say "I don't need 10 acres to provide for my family, but probably one to two acres is more than I need (if I'm doing it correctly).

And, I think that's really where the future of agriculture is going to go (not only here in Hawaii, but also nationwide).

[Music Playing]

My favorite item... the Down to Earth deli is awesome!

And, my favorite item at the Down to Earth Deli has to go into two categories-- one of them is the entree, and the other one is a dessert.

I love the Korean spicy tofu.

I'm not sure if that's exactly the name of it.

But that's one of my favorite dishes there--with some of the curries that they have.

And then, of course, you got to have... you can't have just the curry when... every time I go to Kakaako store or the Kapolei store--you can't just have the entree, you got to have the cookies. And so...

I usually open up the cookie thing, and I try to get a few cookies for everyone else.

But, on the drive back home we usually end up eating them all. But the cookies are incredible!

[Music Playing]