

Tolentino Honey Company Video Transcript

(tranquil music)

- My name is Marina Tolentino.

My husband and I moved here in 2016 after being gone for a while.

We're on his family farm.

So, this is based in Lualualei in Waianae.

And, he grew up on this farm.

His parents have been growing here since the 1980s.

Long story short, we had no idea that his mom's hobby of beekeeping was what it was.

Like, we thought okay, we're gonna like move home in 2016 and it's just gonna be like 10, 20 hives.

(bees buzzing)

That was not the situation whatsoever.

(Marina chuckling)

So, we roll up to like check out the farm with the baby, and there's 250 beehives.

And at this point, she's spending thousands of dollars to ship pallets of beekeeping equipment over here and then giving away honey for free just because she loves honey.

So, these are like her babies-- is what she calls them.

Her little insight of what she learned from the UH Honeybee Project, she's been partnering with them, and then just over the years, grew and grew and grew, and just expanded to what it was then.

She invited me to suit up one day and at this time, like I never thought I would be a beekeeper.

Like I was the girl terrified at picnics that there's a bee on my plate.

Like screaming, running round.

And she was like, "Why don't you just come out and see."

And, I had a friend who was obsessed.

Her nickname was Bee, she had a bee tattoo and she was like dying to come to the farm.

And, I was like, "Uh, okay, if you do it, I'll do it, you know?"

And, we suited up and it was like this aha moment.

Like we cracked open the hive and like we're shaking out of fear but you're seeing the entire lifespan of a bee in there.

So you're seeing eggs, you're seeing the queen, you're seeing little babies being born, like poking their heads out.

You're seeing the honey being transferred from worker bee to worker bee, and it was just like wow.

This is amazing.

And, I think that was kind of what sparked this idea, okay, there's potential here.

This is rare.

Not even nationwide but just in Hawaii.

It's such a special thing.

And, so we kind of talked about it and we're like maybe we should learn more information and just see what's possible.

Simultaneously, there was another beekeeper who's like a nomad beekeeper and he travels around and helps other beekeepers in the world basically.

Happened to be in Waianae at the same time.

And, so we worked out a trade where he bought 100 hives and in exchange, we would get mentorship from him.

So for six, seven months, twice a week we would come out here for four hours each and he taught me everything he knew.

And that was such a blessing-- because normally as you're a beekeeper, you're like YouTubing, you're reading informational books, but you need hands-on mentorship.

You need like that one-on-one.

So, we got all of that right off the bat.

And then, just learned this is amazing.

Let's keep it going.

But then I knew starting the company, I didn't want it just to be like an average honey company.

I wanted it to be premium, high-quality... Keep it raw, keep it good.

And so, we came up with a really clean label design and launched in January of 2017.

My husband and I trade off.

He's taken on the beekeeping side now whereas I had started and he had a federal job.

So, kind of switched.

So, two to three times a week, he'll come to the farm, open hives.

He's just doing maintenance.

So, you're looking for health, you're looking for any possible pests.

You wanna see eggs, make sure that your queen is nice and healthy.

And definitely, honey production.

Where are they at?

Are they decreasing?

Are they eating it back?

Do they have an oversupply?

Do we need to monitor if we're gonna harvest soon?

And that's where it does change seasonally.

April through October is harvest season, which is really long when you consider the mainland.

So, we harvest once a month at least the entire summer to fall.

When we're harvesting, it's like one to two days of pulling honey supers off the hives, bringing 'em to our house and then probably like another one to two days to extract.

When we do that, we're doing like 40 boxes at once, which is kind of crazy.

And, a lot of people don't know this-- but it's just me and Ryan.

We don't have any staff.

We don't have...

Like mom and dad don't help with this.

We just do it all by ourselves.

So, it's like baby's nap, okay, now we get to work.

It's literally just a tag team.

But in the winter, it's pretty chill.

We're just maintaining, making sure that they're healthy and they're good.

We don't hibernate here, so they're still cranking out, they're still working but it's a much slower rate.

Each box has 10 frames and it takes about two boxes to do a five-gallon bucket.

I would say we usually do anywhere from like 12 to 17 five-gallon buckets in a harvest.

Most of what we're surrounded with is kiawe.

So, where we are, we're at the back of the valley, the last road, and everything behind this is wild kiawe.

It's military land and it's just overgrown, like this mesquite tree.

So, it has these yellow blossoms and those are definitely popping from like even March sometimes all the way through July, a little bit of August.

That's our primary honey source, and it's the really light, creams really easily, crystallizes really fast.

That's like our premium honey, and then I would say mid-summer to fall, it starts to get really dark.

So, it transitions from like this rainbow effect, this hombra into a dark color--but we don't know what that is.

We wanna get it tested really bad but we're having a problem finding a lab that'll do it.

So, I think it's on the mainland, we have to ship it and figure it out but we'd love to know what it is.

So, we just call it our tropical blossom.

Mid-summer, it does taste really fruity.

So, that's mango season.

We don't know if they're eating some kind of mango something or other.

But it tastes like Hawaii-- which a lot of people love that.

And then, in the fall, it gets really dark and it becomes bitter almost.

So, it becomes a savory honey.

Some people say it has like a tobacco aftertaste, which is really interesting.

So, we have this whole variety and spectrum of flavors that just changes from what's blooming.

We feel like we're part of the system.

You're literally hands on, outdoors every day.

You know that without this one ingredient, nothing else would happen, right?

There's like this sense of responsibility and like respect I think we have with our job.

It's important.

And, we know if we didn't do it, this entire valley could suffer.

And so, all of these organic farms that are around us, like our neighbors are Kahumana on this side, MA'O on this side, they're all getting the reproduction of our bees, which is amazing.

It's like we have this role and this responsibility to really take care of our bees and treat them with what they need in order to survive and thrive.

So for us, it's really important that bees come number one, honey comes second.

We only take honey if we have a surplus, and they have more than enough to survive.

From the outside, people will see our Instagram and it's so pretty, and they think we're this huge company, right?

But no, it's me and Ryan and we just take turns.

We're parenting at the same time, and we've got a five-year-old and now an 11-month-old.

But also, it's just family first number one and then I would say the other thing is we're not in it to be this huge corporation.

We wanna keep it small and it's a legacy project.

We want this to inspire and encourage our kids to get into farming one day, and we would love to pass this on just because we know how special this is.

So we feel like we've been blessed with this gift.

Let's take care of it.

Let's really just invest everything we can for the next generation.