

Fung Yang, owner





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SMALL KINE FARM

When Fung Yang first started growing mushrooms on less than an acre in Waimānalo several years ago, he needed a way to market and sell his product.

The farmers' market, to him, was a no brainer.

It was slow at first. He made just \$500 the first year he started selling his Portobello varieties back in 2011. But soon, mostly through word-of-mouth and visibility at the farmers' markets, he was able to grow his business, employ three workers, and become O'ahu's only portabella mushroom farm. He has regular standing-order clients and his certified-organic mushrooms can be found in specialty stores and restaurants around the state.

"To be honest, the farmer's markets actually helped me launch my business," says Yang, 46. "When you start farming, you make a lot of mistakes. Sometimes you get products, sometimes you don't. If you don't have products (consistently), you can't sell to restaurants or grocery stores. But at farmer's markets, you don't have that problem. No one will say anything to you if you don't show up. You just bring your products and sell them."

Yang didn't start out as farmer. In fact, he was running another company, O'ahu Community Recycling, which offers pick-up recycling services around the island. After doing some research, he discovered that the bulk of the trash he was picking up could be repurposed as fertilizer. (More than 60 percent of it was organic waste.)

So he decided to process the green waste, which creates a nutrient-rich, heat-pasteurized compost perfect for mushrooms.

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"I didn't have to create the market," Yang says. "The market was already there."

And the difference between his and the imported variety is evident when you just look at his soft, luscious mushrooms.

"Our mushrooms are fresh," he says. "We pick mushrooms every day in Waimānalo. I cannot tell you how fresh they are. They're picked in the morning and we sell them the same day. How can you do that with Mainland mushrooms?"

Today, Yang still sells his mushrooms at farmers' markets around O'ahu. In addition to direct sales to customers, the markets give him a platform to test out new value-added products made with his mushrooms, like pickled mushrooms, mushroom powder and mushroom rubs.

"It's a great way to test out new products," he says.