

## EXPORT AND MARKETING EXPANSION TO JAPAN

**ABOUT AUNTY LILIKOI, LLC.** The Aunty Lilikoi brand has been a staple on the island of Kauai for 28 years. In 2000, a husband and wife team, Elpidio “Tony” Cardenas and Lori Cardenas, purchased the company from the original owner and began the task of growing the brand and expanding the product offering. Together they expanded the original five recipes to more than 50 award-winning dessert and condiment items. Aunty Lilikoi specializes in manufacturing and selling a line of desserts and condiment items, such as jellies, mustard, butters, syrups, dressings, and sauces made with passion fruit. The company also offers a line of personal care products made with passionflower essential oil.

**THE CHALLENGE.** Over the years, Aunty Lilikoi experienced a steady rise in the popularity of its products with international customers - particularly those from Japan. The company's management understood that the potential demand from this market was substantial and wanted to find a way to reach these customers. While Aunty Lilikoi enjoyed established relationships with local and national wholesale buyers, the company did not have working relationships with wholesale buyers in Japan. In order to increase its international presence and begin manufacturing products in Japan, the company needed to connect with a local importer.

**MEP CENTER'S ROLE.** With the assistance of INNOVATE Hawaii, part of the MEP National Network™, Aunty Lilikoi was able to participate in the 2016 FoodEx Japan. FoodEx Japan is Asia's largest exhibition dedicated to food and drink with approximately 80,000 food service, distribution, and trading buyers in attendance. Aunty Lilikoi's management was able to successfully procure an importer at FoodEx Japan.

INNOVATE Hawaii also worked with Aunty Lilikoi to prepare for and attend FABEX Japan in 2017. This trade fair is one of the largest in Japan, covering the entire range of commercial foods and food products, equipment and materials, and containers and packaging for food/beverage, bakery and desserts companies. Aunty Lilikoi's management was eager to attend since most other attendees were wholesale buyers. While visiting Japan, Aunty Lilikoi's management was able to reconnect with importer, Mack Kijima. Mr. Kijima took the team to see and inspect a potential packaging plant. The company is navigating the next step of procuring materials, and formalizing a manufacturing and packaging agreement.

**"INNOVATE Hawaii is extremely responsive to the needs of local manufacturers. The INNOVATE Hawaii team has been able to connect us with industry experts, answer questions that we have and develop company specific plans to ensure that our manufacturing plant meets both local and federal guidelines."**

-Lori A. Cardenas, Owner

## RESULTS



Entering baked goods market in Japan



Forecasting **10%** increase in total revenue upon manufacturing & exporting to Japan

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