

HAWAII ULU PRODUCERS - E-COMMERCE PROGRAM

ABOUT HAWAII ULU PRODUCERS COOPERATIVE. The Hawai'i 'Ulu Producers Cooperative (HUPC) was founded in 2016 by Dana Shapiro after she started to reach out to other 'ulu (breadfruit) farmers on the Big Island of Hawai'i looking to market their breadfruit. In 2015, she and her husband Noa Lincoln, a professor of indigenous cropping systems at the University of Hawai'i, started farming 'ulu, an indigenous staple crop of Hawai'i with numerous health benefits and great potential to improve Hawai'i's food security. However, due to the highly seasonal nature of 'ulu, and its short shelf life, there were major marketing challenges to overcome. After talking with other farmers, it was clear that many faced similar production and volume challenges. Dana and Noa's farm - Mala Kalu'ulu, along with eight other farmers, signed on to start Hawai'i 'Ulu Producers Cooperative with support from the Ulupono Initiative and several USDA grants.

THE CHALLENGE. Prior to COVID-19, the Department of Education was the main customer of Hawai'i 'Ulu Producers Cooperative through their 'Aina Pono Farm to School program, which provided fresh local food to students at all 256 public schools across the state of Hawai'i. When COVID-19 caused schools to close in March 2020 this statewide program was halted. By April 2020 co-op management understood that it was time to diversify HUPC's markets, including through development of a functional online store to increase demand from household buyers interested in ordering food online. The team brainstormed creative ways of making their product line - previously designed for commercial and institutional foodservice - more accessible to Hawai'i families and came up with a series of small and large "food boxes" incorporating minimally processed, steamed frozen staples with ready-to-eat 'ulu products such as nondairy chocolate mousse and 'ulu hummus as well as products from other Hawai'i producers.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. Anissa Lucero, a digital marketing specialist with HUPC, participated in a Mana Up webinar focused on e-commerce. The webinar led them to Innovate Hawaii, part of the MEP National Network™, and its e-commerce cohort program. The Innovate Hawaii e-commerce cohort let HUPC's marketing and management team consult with and learn from local digital marketing experts, receive valuable website design feedback, and one-on-one assistance from marketing professionals. This professional assistance provided critical answers and direction to many of the team's complex and multi-faceted digital marketing questions. It also allowed them to connect and network with other businesses and manufacturers in Hawai'i.

"I would highly recommend Innovate Hawaii to other businesses looking to build their online presence. Working with marketing professionals through this program has allowed us to learn best practices in online sales and digital marketing, and to discover new concepts and tools for e-commerce, which we will continue to implement and refine now and into the future. We have gained immense insight into e-commerce and how to leverage social media and email marketing for our business. The Innovate Hawaii team was instrumental in helping us develop this aspect of our business."

-Anissa Lucero, Digital Marketing Specialist

RESULTS



\$7,000 - 10,000 per month in increased online sales



Training helped client develop an online presence leading to sales increase



Direct consulting helped improve online marketing strategy which helped bring in new sales

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