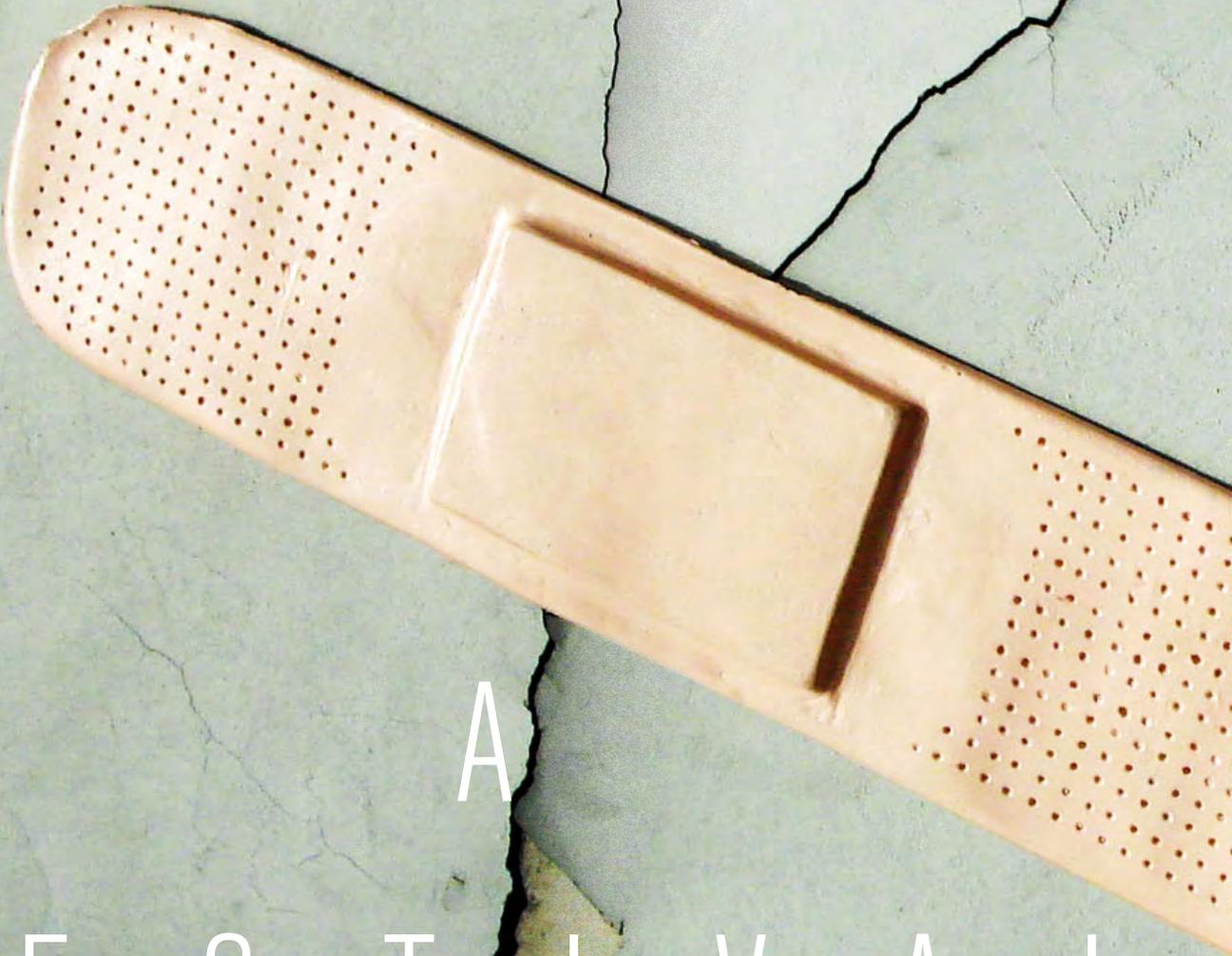


R E P A I R I N G  
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C O M M U N I T Y  
T H R O U G H



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F E S T I V A L



BY THOMAS NIZO

## HISTORY

In 1835, the first commercially successful sugar cane plantation in Hawai'i was born here on the island of Kaua'i and would become Hawai'i's largest industry. In 1980, there were a total of 9 different plantation companies operating over 220,000 acres of sugar cane production throughout the state. Almost 175 years from its inception, the last load of Kaua'i's sugar cane stalks headed to the mill for processing in 2009.

### The Economic Change

With the sugar era coming to a close and hundreds of thousands of acres zoned exclusively for agricultural use, large land owners began leasing to Ag companies raising GMO crops. It became almost a seamless transition as plantation workers shifted from growing sugar cane to growing mostly corn. However, residents, most of whom were not part of the plantation families, did not easily accept this change in industry due to what they perceived as increased pesticide use. With sugar production, spraying of pesticides occurred once every 2 years when the crop reached maturity and had to be planted anew while corn production had faster crop rotations but sprayed smaller areas 3 times a year. The general public focused on the new frequency of spraying rather than the amounts used per acre per year. The island communities became divided on the issue and the creation of Bill 2491 fueled the controversy even more.

### The Clash of Paradigms

Bill 2491 was introduced to our County Council on June 21, 2013, to regulate pesticide usage and GMO testing and if ratified by our Mayor,

would become law in 9 months time. The issue divided families, communities and ultimately the island. Thousands of residents for either side of the issue became activists and demonstrators. Both groups protested almost daily with signs, provided opposing hours of testimony at public hearings and marched in massive numbers in front of our government buildings wearing colored t-shirts that represented the side they supported. In August of 2014, a Supreme Court Judge invalidated the bill stating there was already "a comprehensive framework for addressing the application of restricted use pesticides and planting of GMO crops in place for the State."<sup>1</sup> Honolulu Civil Beat, August 25, 2014

### A Calculated Decision

The end of Bill 2491 left its supporters feeling defeated. Ag company employees returned back to work with anxiety wondering if their jobs would again be in jeopardy. As the festival organizer of Waimea Town Celebration (WTC), the longest running festival on Kaua'i, I contemplated whether WTC could help with interaction and education to bridge the gap between our torn communities. But was this even my kuleana



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(responsibility)? Were there negative consequences if I did nothing? Or would there be ramifications if I did something?

Our WTC committee turned to an ORM (Operational Risk Management) Quad to help visualize the "best scenario" of the possible outcomes needed to make a "Strategic Leverage" decision. The influence and long history of our festival was strong enough to bring these groups together in one place. The State & local governments, Ag companies and anti-GMO supporters could all benefit if we worked together to provide an event(s) for our community as a whole, and so I began to meet with key people from each of these groups to develop a shared vision for us all.

### Changing Paradigms Through a Festival

The Ag companies are located on the west side of Kaua'i, the same side of the island where our WTC 8-day festival has been held for almost 40 years. The Ag companies have donated funding in the past for our festival but with limited promotion of their companies. We wanted to increase their active participation at our festival and give them opportunities to provide open communication and instill a higher level of trust with the people who viewed their silence as secrecy. We believed that if they stepped out from the background, took on the burden of proof in the community's eyes by becoming more transparent with their processes and showed that they had "aloha 'aina" (love and respect for

the land), we could be successful in bridging together our community.

Through our discussions with key leaders, our WTC committee outlined the Mauka 2 Makai Activation Plan, that spans 4 years of participation and would feature their mission of work while addressing the questions and concerns of the general public for their farming practices on Kaua'i.

### Year 1 – More Visibility

To step out from the background and become more accessible to the community, the Ag companies would host a vendor booth at our festival, provide give-aways and feature commonly used GMO household products.

The main goal for Year 1 was to show that the Ag companies were more than just large corporate Mainland structures that happened to employ local residents. It was important to show that they are integrated throughout our community and support our local sports teams, school events and non-profit organizations. Hosting a vendor booth with Super Sweet Corn give-a-ways drew attention to their booth, made them more visible and accessible for information rather than a silent partner.

Another primary goal for their inaugural year of active participation was to educate and dispel misinformation that had spread like a firestorm through social media. Through featuring commonly used GMO products at their vendor booth, like soy sauce (a condiment used daily in most of Kaua'i households), attendees learned that 81%

of soybeans produced in the United States are genetically modified. To know this statistic, gives clarity, especially to those who oppose using GMO products.

### Year 2 – Transparency with Processes

In addition to hosting a vendor booth as they did in Year 1, Ag companies would now include 45-minute site tours of their processing facilities as well as provide static displays of high attention issues.

Year 2 would provide another level of transparency by lifting the "corporate veil" and adding factory tours of their respective sites. Utilizing the current demographic of the festival would leverage the amount of participants who would have the opportunity to go on these tours and see static displays that included national issues and how it pertained to our local environment as well as displays that graphed their pesticide usage and EPA safe level thresholds that was of particular concern to a lot of residents during the controversial era of Bill 2491.

### Year 3 – Sharing Information & Assets with the Community

This tier solidifies the strategic leverage efforts and bridges the investment gap of Ag companies' support of local farmers and other businesses who could benefit through participation.

In Year 3, the Ag Companies would host an auxiliary event on their property within the festival time period.

### Mauka 2 Makai (From the Mountains to the Sea) Event

#### Day Time Event (10:00 am – 4:00 pm)

- Sponsor free booths for non-profits with common interests (ex. local 4-H and Future Farmers of America groups)
- Display of all GMO products readily available at local markets (ex. corn, tomatoes, onions, avocados, soybeans, etc.)
- Feature cooking demonstrations by executive chefs highlighting GMO products
- Give-a-ways
- 45 min processing to end-result facility tours and narrated shuttle bus tours of the fields and buffer zones
- Provide local entertainment
- Stage crop machinery around the grounds with interpretive signage or experts on the subjects, showcase the technological advances of spraying application techniques and current modified crops that require less pesticides/herbicides
- Highlight the overall advancement of farming techniques, different

uses of technology with monitoring and increases of yield production compared to early farm techniques

- Provide static displays and an informative pesticide/herbicide use permit session including types of chemicals, amounts used, safety thresholds, EPA controls and documentation of application processes such as no application due to high wind speed
- Create an interactive play area for children with RC tractors similar to the current machinery used in the fields to simulate actual operating processes and workloads
- Incorporate a farmer's market venue for other sustainable businesses to actively sell their products (farmers, fishermen, ranchers and ornamentals)

*Evening Event (6:00 pm – 9:00 pm)*

- "Honor a Farmer" Recognition Dinner

### Year 4 – Show Continued Commitment to Aloha 'Āina

With feedback received from participants in Years 1 through 3, the Ag Companies would commit to create an annual event with refreshed content, interactive & informative sessions of their progress and continued updated information (ex. EPA regulations).

### Ho'oponopono: A Native Hawaiian Method for Conflict Resolution

Our Native Hawaiian people have a deeply rooted and proven method of conflict resolution called Ho'oponopono (to make right) that a person can practice to restore individual peace. We believe that everyone has three (3) basic Piko

(centers of a person) to help them come to their own healthy conclusion while also accepting a difference of opinion. The first Piko is the po'o (head) where you take information in with your maka (eyes) to see the opposite perspective and the pepeiao (ears) to hear and acknowledge this position. The second Piko is the na'au (gut feeling) where you internalize how you are feeling towards that position based on what you have seen and heard. The third Piko is the pu'uwai (the heart), which is where you formulate your own conclusion, which may not always be favorable with everyone, but you are able to deliver where you stand with aloha (love and respect).

A volatile issue that many people feel so passionate about requires a bit of finesse when trying to get opposing sides to reconcile or come to an agreement that all can live with, and it would take more than a festival event to change the hurt feelings of our residents on this issue. What our festival could do, however, was provide an arena of opportunity to bring people together to see the opposite side in a non-combative way and implement Ho'oponopono to restore peace to our community.

### Status and Outcome

The Ag companies have taken big steps to come out from the background and increase their transparency within the community. They have not only actively participated in our festival for the past 2 years, but they have increased their visibility in the community by sponsoring a sweet onion contest with a State department and partnered with a local pig farmer

in a "Guess the Weight" contest.

Earlier this year, they implemented several parts of our "Mauka 2 Makai" Activation Plan through an "Open House" held at one of their sites. Activities included informative static displays, staged machinery on their grounds for hands-on experiences, and walking tours with experts throughout their processing plant ending with a free luncheon including musical entertainment.

The components of the Mauka 2 Makai Activation Plan have been mostly well received by the hundreds of participants they hosted from both sides of the issue. Many participants gave feedback that they had gained more clarity by being informed and the Ag companies were also able to gather public input to change spraying techniques near homes and schools.

### Conclusions

3 years have passed since the introduction of Bill 2491, 2 years since the Supreme Court ruling and Kaua'i still has strong differences of opinion on the issue. However, the public has taken advantage of the opportunity to participate with the Ag companies in educational and informative meetings, which have somewhat, diffused the situation. There is still much more work to be done as apprehensiveness towards the Ag companies is still evident, but we have seen that food, fun and facts can bring our community to the table and we hope that the Ho'oponopono process will continue to repair relations between friends, families, communities and the island of Kaua'i.



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**Thomas Nizo, Facilities Operation Specialist, DOD, Navy; Historic Waimea Theater Manager; Wameia Town Celebration: Heritage of Aloha Festival Chair,** involved in producing many other community events such as light parades, 4th of July Celebrations and live theater for the past 23 years. Measures success by "Smiles per Dollar". Native to Kaua'i, Hawaii and my favorite motto "Lead by example, Repetition over Generations equals Traditions" in which Hawaii is rich with.

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