

(upbeat music)

- My name is Dan Ko, and
I'm the owner of Ko Farms.

We've been farming for about 35 years.

And I started with a
small farm in Hawaii Kai.

We were growing bananas and
that was the first time that I

had interaction with Down to Earth,
and I started marketing our bananas
to the King Street store.

Our farm is 2.2 acres,
and one of the things that
really impressed me about working

with Down to Earth and then
also providing local produce is

that they value or high
quality organic produce.

And so we've moved from
bananas to salad mix,
and now we're doing a host of greens,
kale, collards, dino kale.

We do mint, and a few other herbs
and also some baby bok choy,
which is one of our new premier crops.

Yeah so, my background
is in soil conservation.

I work with the department of agriculture
for about 13 years, and one
of the values that we have
is obviously keeping cover
on all of our bare spots.

We're in a hilly area, high rainfall.

So erosion control is one of our,

one of the values that we have,

while we're also into really sustainable practices,

as far as using compost and mulches from local sources.

So a lot of the fertilizers

and the soil fertility that we use comes

from locally produced composts and manures.

We're also into minimizing our impact on the environment

by reducing the use of any kind of,

you know, fungicides or insecticides, everything we do

We're the first certified organic farm on a Wahoo.

And so we kind of had those values.

And the reason that we have it is because

I raised my children of five kids on the farm,

and I didn't want them to be exposed

to those kinds of chemicals,

and so we decided to make a change early on

that we would follow organic practices, become certified,

and then it really fits in well with what Down to Earth

is trying to do.

And then I think what the customers want,

is they want highest quality produce at an affordable price.

Well, one of the things that's important,

I think for local farmers is that

they have a steady clientele.

I mean, a lot of our produce
where we're competing

not with local farmers here in Hawaii,

but we're really competing
with the West coast.

And so the West coast
can offer quality produce

at a cheaper price, but of
course you have the freshness,

and I think that's where
the local community

has the corner of the market on this.

A lot of our product we try to get it

from our farm to the
shelf at Down to Earth,

before 24 hours has elapsed.

So that's one of the values that we have.

We have our team out here
early in the morning packing,

and we try to deliver it by mid day,

so that there's absolute freshness.

And that helps to preserve the
quality of the crops because

you know, there's a lot of shrinkage.

The mainland shrinkage is pretty high,

but I think the local produce is low.

And of course there's other reasons

of just economic viability.

Every dollar that's generated
and stays in Hawaii helps

to generate, you know,
numerous jobs in the community.

And that's important to me.

We have vendors that we get,
paper products, different kinds

of packaging products, and then the people
that use our products as well.

So I think staying in
Hawaii, growing Hawaii,
that's important for everybody.

So when we first started,
and this was back in the early eighties,
even late seventies, early eighties,

I had a banana farm and
it was just a small farm,

maybe about an acre,
and I was in high school.

I didn't really know what I was doing.

And so I walked in,

I called Down to Earth and this was
the King street location, and I asked them

if they were interested
in buying some produce

some bananas, they said,
bring it by our side.

Not knowing better, I
brought the whole bunch.

And they said, " Oh, we
really need them in a box. "

And so they gave me a knife

and let me cut them out in the
back and then bring them in,

but I was basically just
developing a relationship

with the produce manager at the time,

and then slowly growing from bananas to,
we did salad mix with Down to Earth,
and then growing into where we are now.

And so it really was a great relationship.

I think for somebody who
didn't know a lot at the time,

to be able to work with a company

that was providing produce,

it made it, the transition
really easy to go

from just small scale to
a little bit bigger scale.

At one point we had about 20 acres,

and we were providing
many different selections

for Down to Earth.

So I've raised all my kids on our farm,

in the back of this Valley.

We've been here for over 30 years,

and now I have five grandkids,

and my hope is that one
of my kids will come back

and take over the farm,

and that my grandkids will
also have this experience.

But really looking towards the future,

and the future for a lot
of young people in Hawaii

is that, I think we
can change our paradigm

on thinking that we
need to expand and have

these big acreages in order
to be economically viable.

I think if we look at
the trend that's going on

with some of the leaders in agriculture,

we'll find that there is a
trend to be more intensive

and have less extensive or bigger farms.

In other words, the trend
is to have a smaller farm

that's more concise, easier to manage

and also economically viable.

And so I think we're
gonna see that transition.

In Hawaii sometimes slow
to adopt these things,

but I think we're gonna
see this transition

to intensive agriculture move to Hawaii

where people can say, "I
need 10 acres to provide

"for my family, but
probably one to two acres

"is more than I need if
I'm doing it correctly."

And I think that's really where

the future of agriculture is gonna go.

Not only here in Hawaii,
but also nationwide.

My favorite item, the Down
to Earth Deli is awesome.

And my favorite item at
the Down to Earth Deli

has to go into two categories.

One of them is the entree, and
the other one is a dessert.

I love the Korean spicy tofu.

I'm not sure if that's
exactly the name of it,

but that's one of my favorite dishes there
with some of the curries that they have.

And then of course you gotta have,
you can't have just the Curry.

Every time I go to Kakao
store or the Kopolei store,

you can't just have the entree,
you gotta have the cookies.

And so I usually open up the cookie thing
and try to get like a few cookies
for everyone else,

but on the drive back home
we usually ended up eating them all.

But the cookies are incredible.

(upbeat music)