

INSIDE: TWO HOSPITALITY EXPOS COMING SOON * CONCIERGE TECH

HAWAII *hospitality*

LODGING & FOODSERVICE | MAY/JUNE 2019

Is Maui No Ka Oi? *(the Best)*

The Valley Isle has 'taken great measures' to enhance its allure among travelers



There's Something About Sunflowers

Maui fields produce gourmet kitchen oil as well as biodiesel fuel

There's something about sunflowers. Something so alluring, so compelling that **Vincent van Gogh** devoted years of his life to creating two different series of sunflower paintings. Something so timelessly beautiful that locals and visitors alike trek to the Maui Tropical Plantation to view and photograph—and be photographed with—acres and acres of sunflowers.

But there's more going on here than “purty flowers” that almost seem to smile back at you.

In partnership with Maui Tropical Plantation, Pacific Biodiesel is growing 115 acres of sunflowers at the base of the West Maui Mountains on the Island's central plain. The result might eventually be enough for Maui to change its official flower from pink roses to sunflowers. (Wouldn't that look good on a *pau* rider and horse?)

“As eye-catching symbols of sustainability, these beautiful blooms showcase Pacific Biodiesel's community-based model of agriculture, clean energy and food,” the company says. “They give us hope for Hawaii's green economy future.”

In all, Pacific Biodiesel has more than 250 acres under cultivation.

The harvest, amazingly, can be used to produce both the fuel that powers your diesel 4x4 double-cab pickup truck and the oil to stir-fry your veggies.

The kitchen oil, a new development for Pacific Biodiesel under its subsidiary Maiden Hawaii Naturals, is quickly grabbing the attention of some top chefs. **Tylun Pang** of Ko restaurant at the Fairmont Kea Lani at Wailea, says guests have commented favorably on the local sunflower oil's “freshness” and “nutty flavor,” and he's been inspired to create dishes based on



Maui Sunflower and Hawaiian Macadamia culinary oils

sunflower oil:

“We use this cold-pressed Maui Sunflower Oil in our fresh dressings and stir-fry dishes that we do for the restaurant,” Pang says. “It's light and flavorful, and it actually doesn't mask any of the local ingredients. It's like gold in a bowl. I actually think it's our Maui Sunshine. We call this Maui EV SO—extra virgin sunflower oil.”

At Maui Tropical Plantation's Mill House, Chef **Taylor Ponte** uses Maui Sunflower Oil as a primary oil in his kitchen, and the restaurant's mixology team uses Maiden Hawaii Naturals' Hawaii macadamia oil in a couple of signature cocktails.

The company expects to have 12-ounce bottles of Maui Sunflower Oil available for consumers in the near future.

(The company is also expanding into natural skincare products with its Kuleana label.)

And the way they grow these remarkably versatile flowers tells a happy eco tale of its own, good for the Island's—and the globe's—ecology while spreading economic benefits. A few key points:

- Sunflowers mature in just 100 days, “from soil to oil,” with three crops possible annually.

- The average yield is 100 gallons of oil per acre.
- They're non-GMO.
- No herbicides or pesticides are used.
- Compost is locally sourced from Maui EKO Systems.
- Machinery involved in farming, including the combines used for harvesting, runs entirely on self-produced biodiesel.
- Bee hives on-site house up to 60,000 bees each, which are used for pollinating sunflowers. Hives are maintained by Honey Hand Hawaii.
- Farming practices are informed by the ancient Hawaiian moon calendar. And it all started at the dump, er, landfill, back in 1995.

Longtime Maui mechanic **Bob King** ran King's Diesel, and while



Bob King

servicing the landfill's generators he noticed large amounts of used cooking oils being dumped. Seeing an opportunity, and a travesty, he began collecting used oil from Maui restaurants

and converting it into biodiesel fuel that was initially used to power those same generators.

What's the big deal with bio fuel?

Biodiesel produces 86 percent fewer carbon emissions than fossil fuels, making it the cleanest liquid fuel available on Earth. It works with all diesel engines built after 1993, either as a sole source or in a mix with regular diesel fuel. Today, Pacific Biodiesel, the first retail biodiesel supplier in the United States, annually collects two to three million gallons of used cooking oils from around Hawaii. Imagine all that yuck seeping into water supplies instead.

All those oils are transported to

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Pacific Biodiesel's refinery outside of Hilo on the Big Island, and then blended with other products, including yellow grease, brown grease, soybean oil, cottonseed oil, canola oil and tallow, as well as sunflower oil of a grade not suitable for human consumption, producing 5.5 million gallons of high-grade biodiesel fuel annually

Sunflowers & Photos

- For more information on Pacific Biodiesel, go to biodiesel.com.
- Admission to view and photograph the sunflowers is free, with parking at Maui Tropical Plantation, 1670 Honoapiilani Hwy. For more information, visit mauitropicalplantation.com.

And with the addition of a custom-designed processor, the Big Island plant is able to supply its own boiler fuel while diverting 270 tons of trap grease from landfills each month.

One thing led to another, and now the sunflowers grown on former sugarcane land go to another part of the facility for pressing into gourmet oils for human consumption.

Not to get too geeky about it, but the difference between sunflower oil used in cooking and sunflower oil used in biodiesel is this: Biodiesel is produced through a chemical process called transesterification, which converts oils and fats of natural origin into fatty acid methyl esters. Simple as that.

Pacific Biodiesel also sells its technology to biodiesel producers, building a dozen facilities on the Mainland and in Japan, and has completed expansions of several of those plants.

The company employs about 100 people, and folks tend to stay for a while—Pacific Biodiesel was just named, again, among the best places in

Hawaii to work. It must be good working on the forefront of saving the planet. *Have a good story about a good person in the Hawaii hospitality industry? Please e-mail me at don@tradepublishing.com.*



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