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DENNIS ODA / DODA@STARBULLETIN.COM

"Eh brah! Like beef?" Those were the words featured on shirts at a station occupied yesterday by May's Hawaii at the annual Hawaii Lodging, Hospitality & Foodservice Expo at Blaisdell Center. At a different station, Jessica Sagun, above, of Y. Hata & Co., showed off some of the beef she had just grilled.

Business to business, booth to booth, a yummy expo

By Erika Engle
eengle@starbulletin.com

Companies serving Hawaii's hospitality and food service industries put on their Sunday best to kick off the industry-only 2005 Hawaii Lodging, Hospitality & Foodservice Expo at Blaisdell Center

yesterday.

Co-sponsor **HFM Foodservice**, a statewide broadline distributor, seemed to have the lion's share of real estate inside the arena. At the end of its food service stations, featured products were shown plated, with silverware, a glass of wine, an entree description card with suggested pricing, and other information restaurateurs might need. Other cards included product ordering information for clients to take with them.

The show enables HFM to touch bases with existing clients and it "validates why they do business with us," said Mike Flores, vice president of sales and marketing.

HFM competitor **Y. Hata & Co. Ltd.** had a large presence in the exhibition hall that included its various product lines such as desserts and other baked goods from **Hans Weiler Foods**, gourmet cheeses and olives from **Island Epicure**, and sizzling offerings from corporate chef Ernesto Limcaco and his star intern, 17-year old Jessica Sagun.

"She's going to be head and shoulders above all the others (culinary students)," Limcaco said. "Knife skills, product knowledge, all of it," he said.

Sagun enthusiastically spoke of Limcaco and Y. Hata. Her internship has included every aspect of the culinary arts down to mopping up and washing dishes, which she was preparing to do with Marissa Ford, granddaughter of the company's founder.



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People in Hawaii's hospitality and food services sectors attended the annual industry-only exposition yesterday where they were able to see the latest products in their fields. Above, Harry Mau, a gourmet specialist, peered from behind one of Island Epicure's cheese displays.

An upcoming arrival was unveiled by **Roselani Ice Cream**, based on Maui, and the Big Island's **Hawaiian Vanilla Co.** Roselani's new gourmet Hawaiian Vanilla Bean Ice Cream, in new cartons, may be in stores by August or September, said Cathy Nobriga Kim, vice president of Roselani. Jim Reddekopp, president of Hawaiian Vanilla, was unable to shake hands as he wore a plastic glove to serve ice cream samples.

Robert Stanga, president of **Hamakua Heritage Farm Inc.** and producer of Hamakua Mushrooms, sauteed his favorite, gray cluster oyster mushrooms for curious tasters. **Costco** and **Marukai** are among the customers who buy his fungi offerings, which include hon-shimeji, alii, shiitake, enoki and maitake mushrooms -- grown on the Big Island. Enoki mushrooms are not just for raw salads anymore, he said, indicating they take well to hot butter in a saute pan for 3 to 5 minutes.

Armstrong Produce's booth was chock-full of local and mainland-grown fruits and veggies, many of them sliced or diced and displayed for sampling.

Richard and June Ha, of Keaau and Mauna Kea Banana fame, offered tastes of their cocktail tomatoes short cucumbers. The Hamakua Sweet tomatoes, from the Has' Hamakua Springs Country Farms, burst in the mouth with truly sweet flavor, and are available at **Foodland**.

Next door was California-based **Babe Farms'** array of eye-catching vegetables, including a stunning purple thing that turned out to be baby cauliflower. There also were bright orangey-yellow, bright green and the familiar white varieties, alongside other specialty baby vegetables and lettuces in a palette of colors so vivid as to make plain old green veggies jealous.

California-based **Nulaid Foods Inc.** got attendees' attention at the arena entrance, preparing omelets with its pasteurized whole egg product or its fat- and cholesterol-free egg product called ReddiEgg. The latter is sold in retail stores but its other products, including a whipped cream topping, are primarily for the food service industry.

"We sell over a million pounds (a year) on Oahu," district sales manager Mike Silver said as he stuffed a mini-omelette with onion, mushroom and crab for Weymouth Kamahana of Molokai, vice president of **Bamboo Pantry**.

One local company displayed what are normally fighting words on newly produced T-shirts. "Eh brah! Like beef?" the shirts seemed to challenge. The words on the back, "We do!" were printed above the name of the company famous for making backyard barbecuing much easier, **May's Hawaii**. Beyond teri-beef burgers, kal-bi and teri-chicken in boxes, the company is about to roll out 1-pound and 3-pound tubs of kalua pig, for retail grocers and the food service industry.

Ono and **Keoki's** have had the corner on the market, said sales representative Steve Akana, but May's parent, **Palama Holdings LLC**, is about to jump into the imu.

The retail market has provided about 80 percent of **Noh Foods'** revenue, but the company is hoping to expand further into the food service industry, said sales manager Kirk Akina. One of its existing clients, the Shorebird, uses Noh's Hawaiian Hot Sauce for its version of buffalo wings.

Saving hotel and restaurant labor costs keeps some companies in business, such as **Finest Food Co. Inc.**, which preps vegetables for commercial kitchens. "We can do it cheaper," said President Derrick Shiraki. His staff of 40 chops, slices and dices using knives, mandolins and Hobart machines, depending on the customers' needs.

Hinode Rice, a product of **Gold River Mills** in California, will introduce rice chips in plain, wasabi and teriyaki flavors next month in Foodland stores. Akin to tortilla chips, salsa was offered for dipping the original flavor. Hinode was also test-marketing crunchy soy beans called soy nuts in white cheddar, chili lime, teriyaki, buffalo wing and wasabi flavors. One golf course operator observed that they would be a hit with beverage-quaffing golfers at the 19th hole.

The food, beverage and wine and spirits booths were the most popular, but other vendors exhibited everything from floor cleaning machines to carpeting and linens to housewares, both rugged and exquisite.

On the decidedly unsexy side is **Island Commodities Corp.**, recyclers of used cooking oil, meat trimmings, fat, bone and fish.

"We're backdoor people," said Carl Tanaka of the environmental company that processes the grease and carcass castoffs.

"Most people don't want to know," he laughed. The operator of **A&K Nursery** buys the company's recycled product for fertilizer. A vase of flowers from A&K decorated **Island Commodities'** booth.

The expo ends today.

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