

Making paradise profitable

Soon after the final black plumes of acrid smoke settled over Pearl Harbor in 1941, Japanese Admiral I. Yamamoto uttered the words that were soon to haunt Japan and her Axis partners, "(We have) awakened a sleeping giant ..."

Those words foretold the course of history.

They still hold prophecy in the Hawaiian islands, but this time, the giant has changed guises—it is a Green Giant ready to rear its head.

There was a time when Hawaii meant grass skirts, thatched huts and coconuts. Life was simple, almost primitive. There are still parts of the 50th state, thankfully, where that lifestyle has been preserved. No where else in the U.S. is over \$5 million a year spent on coconut tree trimming; few landscapers other than those in Hawaii have to coax green, growing plants to emerge from jet black lava rock.

Hawaii. Truly a land of almost quirky contrasts.

But at the very root of Hawaii's appeal—the lush, tropical vegetation—germinates a Green Industry that is in its infancy.

Professional landscaping in Hawaii is a phenomenon reserved mainly for hotels, office parks, and golf courses. The typical Hawaiian landscape is trees and shrubs—no manicured lawns, no elaborate flower beds.

Professional lawn care is non-existent. Most nurseries are outgrowths of backyard farm operations. Experienced help is hard to come by. Many laborers are unfamiliar with safety in pesticide application, and their ignorance is exploited.

Dealers and distributors also deal with a unique set of challenges—equipment in use 365 days a year. Where most parts of the country get a reprieve either from weather or tourists to tackle repairs and do preventive maintenance, such is not the case in Hawaii. There is no off season in paradise.

Talking to landscape architects, contractors, superintendents, equipment and chemical dealers in Hawaii, the feeling seems to be pretty much the same—the area is wide open to knowledgeable entrepreneurs who can exorcise the dollar signs from their eyes. The need and desire for competence in landscaping is ripe.

Tourism will continue to grow, and with it the need for more hotels and golf courses. There are about 55 golf courses already scattered among the five main islands. Golf is a consistent island breadwinner, and, from all indications, will continue to be.

Looking at the broader picture, the U.S. interest in the Pacific is vital—both militarily and commercially. The area is pivotal to our own trade relations with Japan.

Hawaii's continued growth bodes well for the future of agronomics there. The challenge is sorting out, consolidating and retrenching a fledgling industry into a giant who doesn't destroy, but instead nurtures.



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