

Market Link

for primary producers

A publication of the Market Information Service (MIS) - Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
"Linking the market and Primary producers"

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'Ava Samoa (Kava)



'Ava also known as Kava, has historically been an important crop in Samoa and other Pacific countries. It is made from the root of the pepper plant, *Piper methysticum*, found in Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia.

It was one of Samoa's major export crops before the Europeans banned 'ava imports from the

Pacific in the late 1990s due to an 'ava-induced sickness caused by poor product.

This upsets the 'ava industry discouraging farmers to grow 'ava whilst some switching to another crop. However, there was a still strong domestic market for 'ava with most supplies to the main Fugalei and Taufusi market and supermarket stores around the country.

Samoa and other Pacific countries had tried to uplift the European Union (EU) ban for years until their request was approved and the ban was officially removed in 2015.

Today, kava is used across the Pacific in both traditional ceremonies and informal social events. With more kava bars opening in the US, European markets opening up, kava becoming available in more health stores and supermarkets worldwide, and more awareness of its relaxation and health benefits, the profile of kava is on the rise.

Local Production

'Ava is a scrub grown extensively throughout Samoa for its root, from which the national beverage of the same name is made. The drink is an emulsion of the powdered 'ava root and water, prepared and served. It is not an intoxicant and has no injurious effects unless drunk in large quantities.

The 2019 Agricultural Census recorded a total number of households growing Ava of 1,366 and an estimated area covered of 145 acres. It is a reduction of 38% compared to the numbers recorded in 2009, however there is still hope that the industry is still picking up its base as the

exportation of Ava products started to increase in the last couple of months.

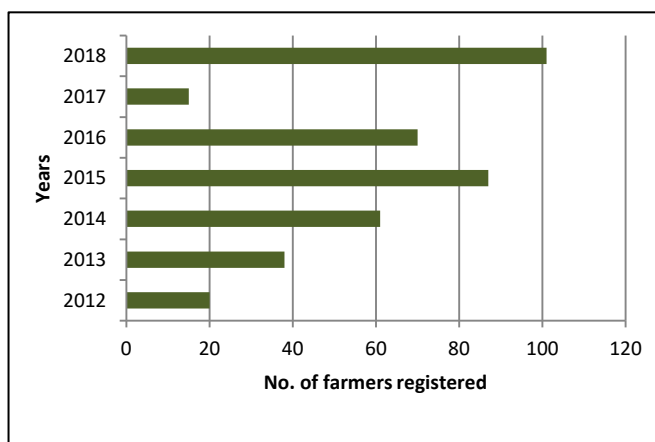
Table 1: Number of Households Growing Ava and Area of Land Under Ava 2019.

	Upolu	Savaii
<i>H/holds Growing Ava</i>	548	818
<i>Area Under Ava in Acres</i>	48.3	97.1
<i>Area Under Ava in Hectares</i>	19.5	39.3

Source: Agriculture Census Report 2019

¹As at 1999 census, land use for growing kava was at its peak utilizing 2.3% of total land area as demand for ‘ava in the European markets was on the rise. However, as of the 2009 census, land use for ‘ava had declined about 70% from 1999 as the same European markets for ‘ava closed reducing the incentive to grow ‘ava. This reduction continues to roll on over the years until a new export market for ava has opened in 2015 and the numbers starts growing more rapidly for ava export in 2016 until 2019.

The annual Agriculture Show held by MAF has shown a great improvement in interested farmers involving in ‘ava production. The drop in 2017 was that there was no show in Savaii but only Upolu. Unfortunately, this activity has been temporarily ceased due to covid 19 restrictions in 2019 till now.



Graph 2: Registered ‘ava growers in Agriculture Show 2012-2018

Source: Statistics Unit-MAF

Growing ‘Ava Tips

Site Selection

Ava is a shade-loving plant and proper care for the young plants should be taken to shelter from the sun’s rays and wind. Favorably grown under a wide variety of conditions:

- To allow for vigorous root growth, soils should be fertile and loose but not allowed drying out.
- Avoid soils that are prone to water-logging since this can inhibit growth and cause root rot.
- Provide shade and protection from the wind for the young plants.

Planting Materials

Experienced growers know that one of the most important decisions in producing quality ‘ava is the selection of planting materials. The first aspect is that the cutting must come from a desirable kava cultivar, one with good drinking characteristics. Secondly, the cutting must be from a healthy and vigorous plant. Diseases can be spread from unhealthy ‘ava plants to the surrounding plants and cause great losses.

The normal method of propagation is to use stem cuttings of one to four nodes in length, but the process varies according to area. Either shoots or stem cuttings can be used, and cuttings can be either planted in a nursery or directed planted in the field.² However direct planting has found less useful for such reasons:

² *Pacific Kava Producers Guide, SPC (2001)*

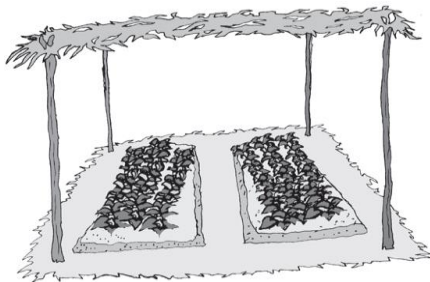
- Requires more planting materials and longer pieces
- Ava cuttings require moist conditions at time of planting to develop shoots and roots.
- Desired spacing can be difficult to achieve with direct planting because not all cuttings will produce plants.

Nurseries

Nurseries are adequately shaded to promote development and prevent the cuttings from drying out.

Ava nursery methods:

1. Planting one or two node cuttings in nursery beds



2. Planting one or two node cuttings in plastic bags

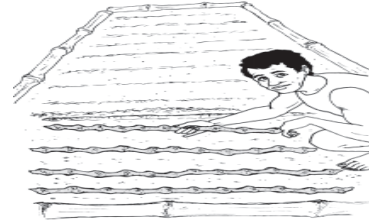


3. Germinating whole 'ava stems in the nursery beds.

Harvesting

Ava

is



harvested after 4 years of planting. Some 'ava expert growers believed that the longer in period the 'ava grows will produce good quality, hence higher concentrations of kava lactones. Kava lactones are the active compounds in 'ava.

Noble Varieties

³According to the Ava Regulation 2018, noble 'ava variety is any 'ava variety that has certain chemical composition adequate for daily human consumption and drinking and have a long history of safe traditional use in Samoa. ⁴Noble 'ava varieties in Samoa:

- 'Ava Le'a
- 'Ava La'au
- 'Ava Loa
- 'Ava Talo
- 'Ava Mumu

Kava dieback Disease

Figure 1: Ava plant showing Dieback disease

Source: SPC Pest Advisory Leaflet No.25



³ Food ('Ava) Regulation 2018

⁴ Samoa 'Ava Standard 2018

⁵ Kava dieback is the most important disease causing losses in ‘ava production in the Pacific.

⁶ Occasionally, the yellowing of the leaves with dead and brown leaf edges is the only symptom seen before stems rot. ⁷ Kava dieback is thought to be caused by cucumber mosaic virus (CMV), either alone or in combination with one or more unknown agents.

The ava industry in Samoa was minor affected by this disease many years ago but was recently seen to be hitting back in which believed most ava farms in Savaii were affected. MAF discovered this quickly and advised farmers to remove and destroy any affected plants to avoid spreading.

No chemical sprays available or CMV-resistant cultivars but to avoid this disease, attention should be given to growing ava on fertile soils and any infected plants should be removed and not to be planted again.

Samoa Ava Standard and Regulation

In order to protect ‘ava industry from exporting of non- noble ‘ava, as well as import compliance protocols, Samoa has launched its first ‘Ava Standard and Regulation on 25th May 2018.

Figure 2: 2018 Samoa ‘Ava Standard



⁵ Pacific Kava Producer's Guide, SPC (2001)

⁶ Pest Advisory Leaflet No.25, SPC (1999)

⁷ Causal relationship between cucumber mosaic cucumovirus and kava dieback in the South Pacific. *Plant Disease*, Davis (1996)

The standard and regulation will guide the way ‘ava and ‘ava products are handled, processed, packaged not only for exported ava to overseas markets but also for the locally sold products and this will also facilitate safe trade by ensuring the products are compliant with quality standards and safe for human consumption. The two policies act as a point of reference for ‘ava stakeholders to improve the quality of ‘ava from production to sales of the commodity.

This standard was initiated by Samoa Association of Manufacturers and Exporters (SAME) and put together by the Samoa National Codex Committee.

Markets

The local market is still the most important market for ‘ava in terms of total size and cash value. There is an increasing demand for ‘ava sold in packets (powdered form) for local consumption at the local markets (Fugalei and Taufusi), small retailers and supermarkets. Usually a cost of a packet is \$9-\$10.00.

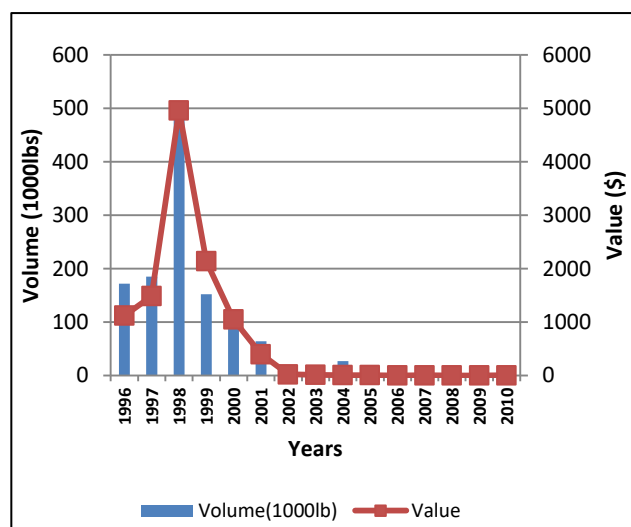
⁸ There are 4 parts of ‘ava that is important for marketing. These include:

- Roots (uso/a’ava ole’ava)
- Chips from stump and rhizomes(aano fisi mai le tugase ma le pogati ole ‘ava)
- Powder(‘ava tu’i)
- Peelings (pa’u mai le tugase male aano fisi mai le pogati)

The export market demands high quality. Exporters have been working well with farmers and buyers for purchasing.

⁸ *Atinaeina ole Ava (Pamphlet)*, MAF

Graph 1: Ava exports 1996-2010

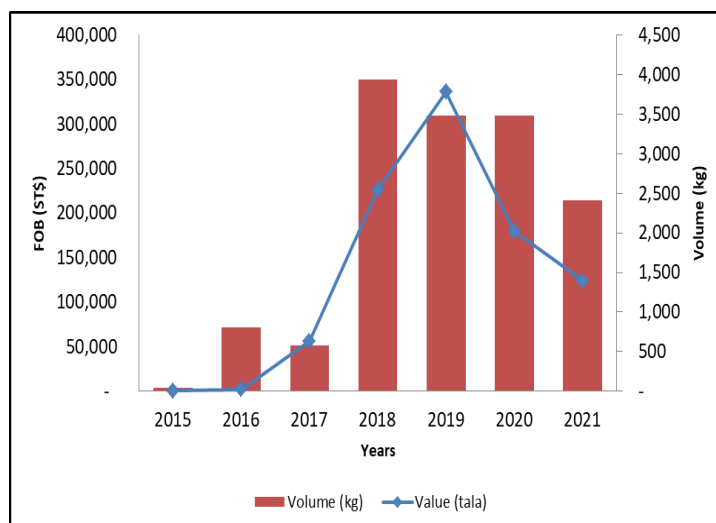


Source: Central Bank of Samoa

Graph 1 show that the year 1997 and 1998 were recorded the glorious years of ‘ava export due to the increase demand for pharmaceutical use. Because of the sudden surge in demand leading to a dramatic rise in price, farmers began to uproot as much ‘ava as they could with including the poor quality kavas. This adversely affected the industry causing the decline in the after years.

Graph 2 shows a low volume of ‘ava export in 2015 to 2017, this was when the ban for exporting ava was just being lifted and the industry was in an unstable position at that time. After 2017, ava export started picking up its base and the large number was exported in 2018 of almost four thousands kilos being exported. Countries such as the USA and Germany demands high quality ava. In 2018, the USA is the leading market both in export volume and value. Increasing demand and high prices led to the increase in 2018 exporting only 3,935kg with the export price of \$57.54/kg. In 2019, the industry recorded a slight decrease and will continue to decrease until 2021 due to covid 19 restrictions that limited the number of shipments for overseas destinations.

Graph 2: Ava export 2015-2021



Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics

Drinking market

⁹The main drinking markets are in the Pacific such as Fiji, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Tonga. There is also kava drinking in Australia, NZ and US particularly in California and Canada.

Pharmaceutical market

¹⁰ In Germany and France ava has been a prescription drug for many years, prescribed in capsule form for patients with psychological problem. The kava lactones in ‘ava are considered as natural replacement for drugs such as valium. This market is precise and a consistent demand for high quality ‘ava.

⁹ Pacific Kava Producer;s Guide, SPC (2001)

¹⁰ Pacific Kava Producer;s Guide, SPC (2001)

Fiji and Vanuatu is the largest ava producing and exporting Pacific countries. Samoa, Tonga and the Solomon Islands also export ava.

Fiji market

Kava is one of the chief export commodities in Fiji next to sugar, garments, gold, fish and mineral water.¹¹ Over 21,000 farms grow kava worth an estimated FJD66 million (AUD42 million) per year.¹² Kava export in Fiji generated nearly F\$20 million in 2017, with an annual average value of nearly F\$8 million during 2007-2017. The New Zealand and United States are the leading export markets of Fiji kava. New Zealand accounted for about 42 per cent of kava export volume followed by USA in 2017 (37 per cent). However, in terms of kava export value, USA was the leading country, contributing nearly 58 per cent of Fiji's total export value in 2020 (Fiji Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Vanuatu market

¹³Kava is the third largest export commodity in Vanuatu, generating an estimated VUV807 million (AUD 10 million) in annual export earnings, and providing income to over 30,000 households across many of the country's islands.

Final Analysis

There is a great potential for growth in the local and export 'ava market. However, the future growth and development of the ava industry needs attention in the areas of production, research and marketing. It is hugely demanded from overseas markets but sometimes cannot be met due to low supplies.

Ava can be a potential commercial crop and can play a major role for export market with the help of its ava standard and regulation for farmers to follow. Ava projects have established by various organizations such as SFFI (Samoa Farmers Federated Incorporated) to help farmers improve and increase their production and in return boost 'ava growers' earnings.

In addition much of the ava farms are grown without using pesticides and chemical fertilizers therefore, organic ava production systems need to be looked into because of the high value niche market for organic products.

Overall, the long years of planting ava before harvesting is all worth the wait.

¹¹ *Pacific Kava Industry Overview, PHAMA*

¹² *(Journal of Pacific Studies, Vol37, Issue1, 2017) data based from Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2018*

¹³ *Pacific Kava Industry Overview, PHAMA*

Average Prices at the Fugalei Market

Commodities (SAT\$/kg)	July 2021	August 2021	Lowest price for 2021 to date	Highest price for 2021 to date
Taro	1.99	2.51	1.60	2.51
Banana	1.12	0.97	0.92	1.12
Taamu	3.42	3.8	3.35	5.17
Coconut	0.94	1.01	0.94	1.01
Breadfruit	1.23	1.07	1.00	1.47
Yam	3.29	3.53	3.28	4.51
Head cabbage	7.31	6.56	6.56	11.89
Tomato	14.46	16.06	13.42	17.26
Chinese cabbage	5.72	4.54	4.54	7.21
Cucumber	4.58	4.54	4.11	5.21
Pumpkin	3.65	3.37	2.91	4.45

Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics-Local market survey

Foreign Currency per Tala (SAT\$)

July-August 2021	USD\$	NZD\$	AUD\$	YEN\$	FJD\$	EURO
1 Samoan Tala SAT\$ =	0.39993	0.5804	0.5573	53.2900	0.8716	0.3959

Source: Bank of South Pacific

Market Link Newsletter

This newsletter is published bi-monthly and it seeks to assist stakeholders (farmers, consumers, wholesalers, policymakers) make informed market and marketing decisions based on credible, relevant price and supply information. Help us help you by providing constructive feedback on market information issues that will improve the service which will lead to growing a healthy and wealthy Samoa. For more information contact the Policy, Planning and Communication Division and ask for So'o Iuvale.

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