

The people behind GMO papayas

Last August, I was invited to speak about genetically engineered crops at a GMO Summit organized by the Hawai'i Crop Improvement Association. The event was held on the big island of Hawai'i, known for its enormous volcanoes, long beaches, and coffee and papaya farms. The HCIA flew me in to speak (honorarium declined), I stayed at people's houses, and while I was in the state I knew I really wanted to see a papaya farm and to meet Dr. Dennis Gonsalves, who developed the genetically engineered ringspot virus-resistant papayas known as SunUp and Rainbow. So I sent him an email, and he was delighted to show me around, and even took me to his home to cook with his papayas!

I had only seen pictures of Dennis before today, so I did not know what to expect. I had seen his picture in a wall of famous agricultural scientists in the Chicago Museum of Science & Industry, but now here he was! He was warm and friendly, and I soon learned the real meaning of Aloha. In Hawai'i, Aloha not only means hello and goodbye, but a state of mind and a way of life defined by openness and welcoming. In Hawai'i, they value maintaining an air of friendship and respect even when disagreeing on political issues (and some of the debates over GMOs reflect a recent divergence from this value). In Dennis, I had met the highest concentration of Aloha yet on the entire trip. If he were a plant, his leaves and roots exuded Aloha into the surrounding air and soil. It was infectious.

In the debate over genetically engineered crops, it is often presented as a conflict between a faceless corporation and a small group of people. Instead, for the papaya, it was a small group of people who triumphed over a faceless plant disease in an effort to help people – the people whose livelihoods, diets, and cultural traditions depend on the papaya. The story of the GMO papaya is a story about people.

Read the full original article: [GMO Papayas are about People](#)