

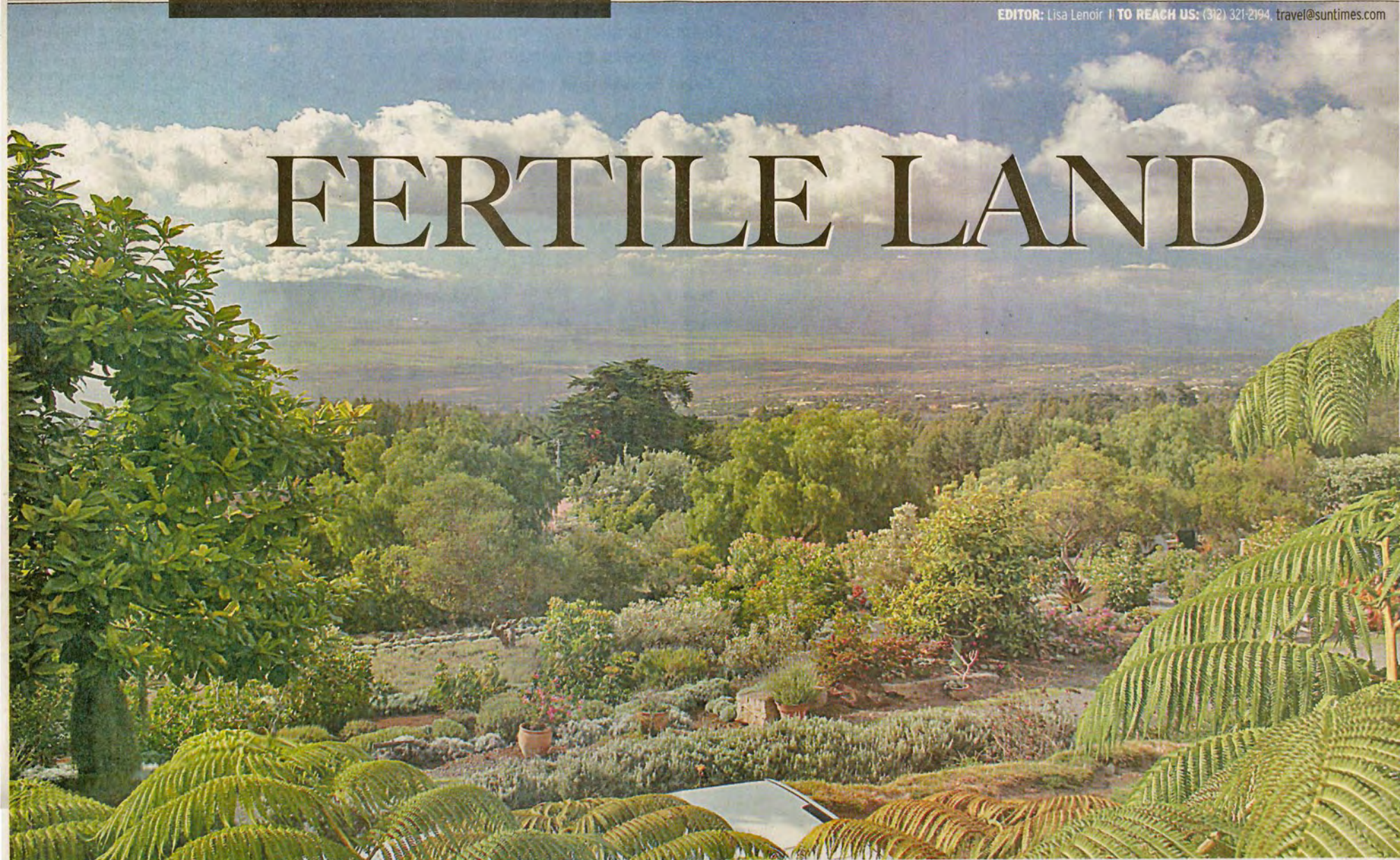


WORD TRAVELS FAST

RE-TRACING A PATH: Author Katharine Reeve charts Bath, England, a haunt of writer Jane Austen in *Jane Austen in Bath: Walking Tours of the Writer's City* (Little Bookroom, \$19.95). See Page 3C.

EDITOR: Lisa Lenoir || TO REACH US: (312) 321-2194, travel@suntimes.com

FERTILE LAND



The Ali'i Kula Lavender Farm in the Kula district looks down toward western Maui from an elevation of 4,000 feet. Visitors can tour the five-acre farm after sampling tea and lavender scones. Lani Weigart and Ali'i Chang (below), the farm's co-owners, also have tea and gift shops on site. —STEVE HAGGERTY/PHOTOS FOR THE SUN-TIMES

Hawaiian island embraces its agrarian past with small farms, dairies

BY ANNE Z. COOKE
AND STEVE HAGGERTY

KULA, Maui — Ali'i Chang buried his nose in a bouquet of fresh lavender, took a deep breath and closed his eyes beatifically. "Mmmm, that is so relaxing," he said, offering the bundle to a group of travelers gathered for tea and scones at his five-acre farm and tea shop, the Ali'i Kula Lavender Farm, on the slopes of the volcano Haleakala.

Suddenly turning playful, he leaped into the adjacent hedge and poked his head out through a protea bush, where one of the giant pink blossoms, as big as a cauliflower, had just opened.

"We used to sell these to the Japanese," he said, beaming at the thought of the late 1980s, when the Japanese were flush. "They couldn't get enough protea. They bought them as fast as we could grow them, until their economy collapsed.

"Then we discovered lavender, a plant that's been around for centuries, since Roman times. It thrives in this cool climate, it's hardy and it has a hundred uses, for essential oils, soaps, lotions, even tea," he said.

Leading us down to the processing shed, where bundles of sprigs lay in stacks, Chang showed us stacks of loose bundles drying, and trays of flowers waiting to be bagged. Eventually,

HAWAII QUAKE UPDATE PAGE 3C

he said, they'd be crushed for oil, stuffed into sachets or mixed into consumer products like fancy soaps, lotions, fruit jams, scones and candles.

After tea, with lavender flavored scones, Chang led us on a tour starting with the lavender field itself, upslope from the tea shop. Here, at 4,000 feet elevation, 45 kinds of the woody gray-green plants climbed the slopes in even

rows, each plant trimmed into a perfect half-sphere as neat as a Japanese garden.

"Isn't that a beautiful sight?" said Chang proudly, surveying his handiwork. "We love to share this place with visitors. It's a reprieve from the traffic on the coast. And we hope people will reconnect with the land. This is the real heart of Maui."

Resurgence of small farms

Travelers who leave the beach for a day to stop by for tea will certainly see how most Hawaiians think of Hawaii's second largest island. Agriculture has always been big business here on Maui. The first Europeans to sail offshore were greeted by hundreds of islanders paddling canoes laden with fruits, vegetables and pigs raised on small plots, and fish grown in man-made pond. In those earliest days, no ship sailed away without a hold full of food.

Most traditional farms disappeared



"Then we discovered lavender, a plant that's been around for centuries, since Roman times."

ALI'I CHANG

Co-owner of Ali'i Kula Lavender Farm

See MAUI, Page 4C

MAUI

Continued from Page 1C

Aloha spirit part of island's small upcountry farms

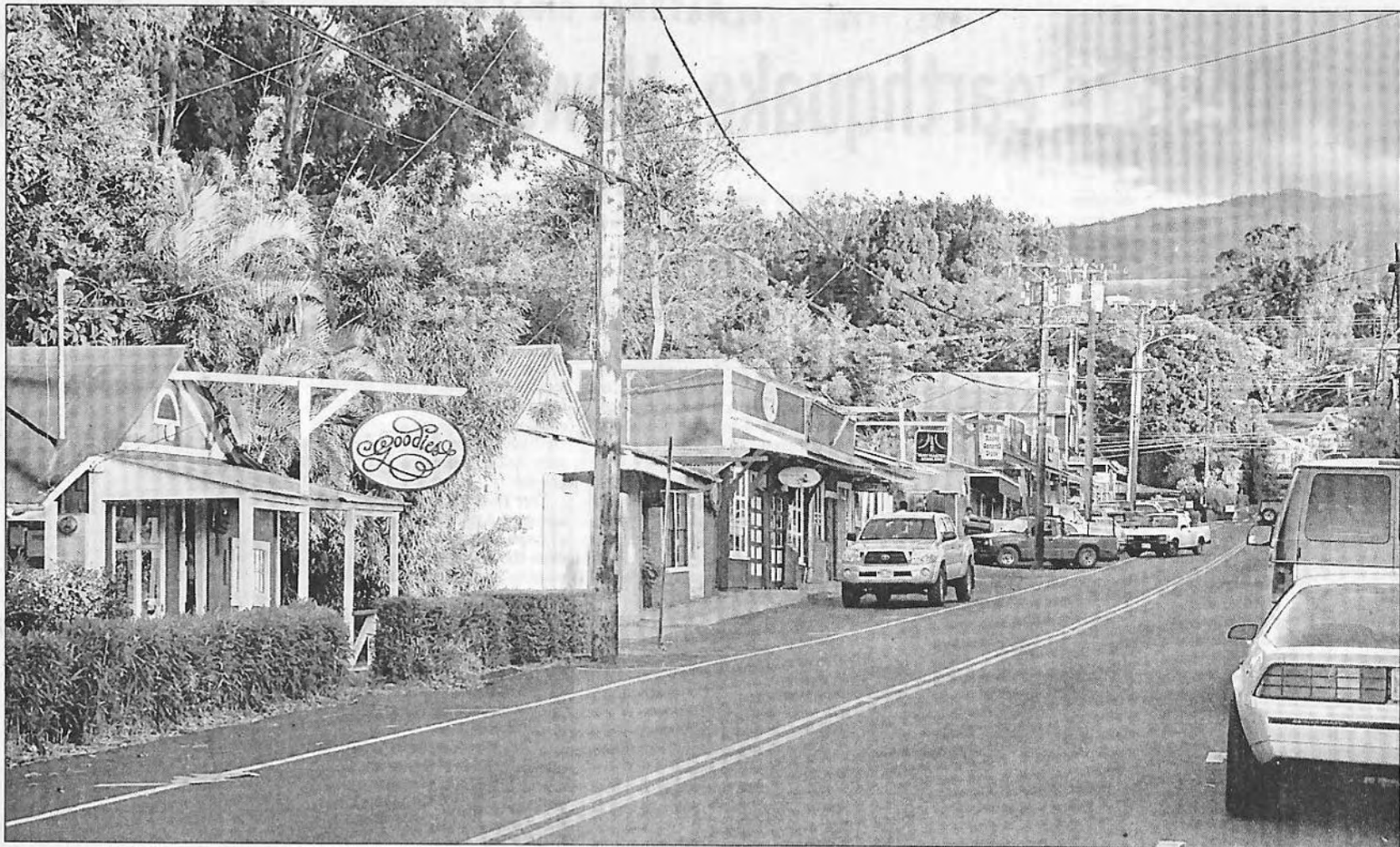
After American and British colonizers introduced sugar cane, Maui's second largest industry, still grown on 37,000 acres. But the recent re-emergence of small-scale vegetable and herb farms between 2,000 and 4,000 feet, "upcountry," in Kula, Makawao and Olinda, is a salutary trend. The volcanic soil is so rich that growers cultivating plots from two to 10 acres grow enough to supply most hotels, restaurants and farmers' markets.

"All the small growers know we're looking for better, fresher produce, so they're always trying new varieties," said Executive Chef Tylun Pang at the Fairmont Kea Lani Hotel in Wailea. "The more we buy, the more they grow, and we all benefit. We used to buy our vegetables from California, but they're two days old by the time we get them. I can order red oak lettuce and baby greens from Kula in the afternoon and they pick them the next morning." While most of Maui's upcountry farms aren't open for tours, many growers still believe in Hawaii's aloha spirit. If you're a closet Luther Burbank — a horticulturalist and gardener — with a resume to match, you might find a grower happy to see you.

We lucked out at the Aina Lani Herb Farm in Makawao, where Chef Dan Fiske, who creates "event" dinners for guests and homeowners at Wailea Beach Villas on Wailea Beach, works hand-in-hand with Mike McCoy, the farm's owner. McCoy, one of 38 growers who sell to Kula Produce, a local wholesaler, also sells (in bulk) to the public.

His west-facing garden grows things you might grow at home, from oregano and marjoram to rosemary, lemon grass, parsley and green onions. He also grows arugula, watercress and mint. But some herbs are experimental. "Mike's growing a half-dozen kinds of basil, each one a unique flavor," said Fiske as he walked through the rows. He plucked off fresh leaves for us to use. "If you like basil, remember that cooking kills the taste. I always sprinkle it on afterwards, but before serving."

Enthusiastic and inventive, McCoy also grows sorrel, Kafir lime leaves and pomelo, as well as papaya and sapote. When the sapote, a pale-green creamy-smooth fruit, ripens, Fiske matched it with a puff



Exploring Maui's upcountry can lead to discoveries of charming old-time storefronts that line the road in Makawao, Maui. —STEVE HAGGERTY/PHOTOS FOR THE SUN-TIMES

pastry for a new dessert. McCoy's hottest items are micro-greens, raised in a greenhouse behind the orchard. Look for them as garnishes, in appetizers and on tapas.

Road less traveled

For me, though, the joy of Kula and Makawao was exploring the roads less traveled.

"You're not going to meet local people or feel the culture if you stay down in condo-land," said Jana McMahon, a private chef. "Rent a car and drive up to the top of Haleakala," she advised us. "In a couple of hours you'll pass through a half-dozen climate zones, from hot dry sea level to rolling farm land, to alpine forests and hills so green I always think of Ireland." She recommends wandering

down narrow lanes and keeping an eye peeled for some of the farms you've discovered the benefits of tourism.

"Check out the Surfing Goat Dairy on your way to Kula, on Omaopia Road," she said. "They make more than a dozen kinds of cheese — feta, chevre, all from goat's milk, of course. The quality and taste is excellent. I buy it, and so do lots of the restaurants. They have a regular tour you can take. Kids like it, too, because they let them try to milk a goat."

Another popular stop is Maui's only winery, Tedeschi Vineyards, at Ulupalakua Ranch, another 20-odd miles south of the Lavender Farm, on Highway 37. The winery makes Carnelian and Chenin Blanc wines, and a specialty party wine made from pineapple. The

setting is beautiful and the trees are magnificent. Bring your own picnic, and be prepared for a long drive, however.

Chang's guided tours of the botanical garden at the Alii Kula Lavender Farm start at 10 a.m. daily, and include a tea service served on the outside deck with scones and jam. And don't miss the gift shop, managed by Lavender Farm co-owner Lani Weigart. Shaded by big eaves and a tin roof, the shop is housed in a redesigned and white-washed plantation shed, with windows and an open-beam ceiling. Filled with shelves and racks, stacked with lovely

gifts in all price ranges, it's a touch of old Hawaii.

The tour and tea party are \$35 per adult, but you can tour the garden on your own, for free, following Chang's self-guided map. The garden, a lush collection of beautiful and rare plants, grows on a west-facing slope, with panoramic views of Ma'alaea Bay to the west, and Kahului Bay to the north. Chang, who hopes you'll like the land, welcomes kindred spirits.

◆◆◆
NOTE: Visitors planning a trip to Maui in the next few days or weeks won't experience any earth-

quake-related delays in travel or problems with driving, according to the Maui Visitors' Bureau, in Wailuku. Flights to and from Kahului International Airport have continued to operate on schedule and all roads are unaffected.

"We felt a big bump, but nothing has been broken or damaged," said Christy Ouprasith, a clerk at the Wailea Beach Villas. "The workmen have inspected every unit, and everything is fine."

Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty are California based free-lance writers.



Traveler Abby Tegnella holds a passion fruit flower grown at Mike McCoy's Aina Lani Herb Farm in Kula, Maui.

IF YOU GO

Alii Kula Lavender Farm: From Kahului, west of the airport, drive southeast on Pulehu Road or Haleakala Highway until you reach Kula Road heading south. At the intersection of Highway 37 and 377, look for Rice Memorial Park and take the second left uphill, following the sign. The tea and gift shops are a short walk up the lane. (808) 878-3004 or www.aliikulalavender.com.

Aina Lani Herb Farm: (808) 572-1771 or www.freshislandherbs.com.

Surfing Goat Dairy: (808) 878-2870 or www.surfinggoatdairy.com.