

ISLAND VOICES

NAME: JESSE LAW

OCCUPATION: FOUNDER, SUSTAINABLE ISLAND PRODUCTS

RESIDENCE: HILO



It's brilliant: 100% compostable packaging and tableware.

Why did you start this business here? I was looking for something that could function as a solution to an existing problem. Per capita, Hawaii is the largest consumer of 'to go' packaging in the country and 30% of this island's landfill is packaging. There's a landfill crisis here – Hilo is overflowing, Kona is almost full.

So it's about garbage. That's what gets people talking. But the case I'm making is for zero waste. This packaging can be locally manufactured, locally used and locally reprocessed into a reusable resource. We can employ people to grow and process the sugarcane for it. In 30 days, this clamshell box is composted. These spoons are roach food.

But are people willing to pay more for it? People love it! They're acutely aware that we're on an island and want alternatives to landfills, shipping garbage off-island and incinerators – the newest proposal. We're seeing people choosing businesses using this packaging over others that don't. I'm a firm believer that the market will drive this.

What can travelers do to minimize their impact on the Big Island? Bring a reusable dining set – it's as easy as a pair of chopsticks, a plate and a cup. Some places even give you a discount for using your own. Support farmers markets and the local economy. Keep it local. People say 'it's cheaper at Wal-Mart,' but it's not. When you do a true cost assessment of the health and environmental costs, it's not cheaper.