

BASF on Kauai

A West Side Story

BASF Plant Science

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 **BASF**
We create chemistry

Who We Are

The BASF farm on the west side of Kauai was founded 10 years ago on approximately 1,000 acres of land. After conducting field trials with a local farmer to see if the West Side of Kauai would be suitable for the company’s farming needs, BASF established the research farm.

The farm is a “winter nursery” designed to grow seeds for BASF Plant Science research. We do not produce seed for direct commercial use, but cultivate seeds to produce desired traits that can then be incorporated into commercial hybrid seeds. BASF grows corn, soybeans, rice, canola and sunflowers on approximately 1000 acres at its West Side farm.

BASF chose the Kauai location because of the area’s good growing conditions, its past history of successful agriculture, the availability of land, and the existing irrigation infrastructure.

Currently 11 employees work full-time on the farm, and depending on the time of year, BASF also employs 12-30 part-time workers. Three of the full-time staff and most of the part-timers were born and raised on Kauai. Most of the others have lived on the Garden Isle for at least five years. With such a small group, employees maintain a close-knit, family type atmosphere. They care about each other, they care about the farm, and they care about their community. Our people are well-trained and highly valued for the skills they bring to our operations every day. All of our full-time and some of the part-time staff members have education beyond high school.

Why We’re Here

The West Side is ideally suited to be the location of BASF’s research farm operation. The farm is able to support two to three crop cycles per year, compared to just one at most places on the mainland. That is a very important distinction.

By producing more than one crop per year, we are able to bring the innovations they produce to market more rapidly, benefiting farmers and ultimately consumers. Farmers will see improvements in the crops they grow thanks to the BASF-discovered traits incorporated into crop seeds that are made available for sale by our commercial partners. We provide farmers with crops that can better tolerate stress such as drought and also provide higher yielding crops. As a result, consumers will continue to enjoy food with higher nutritional content and greater availability, at reasonable prices. BASF innovations reach farmers and the American dinner table faster because we are on Kauai.

Even with the ability to grow crops year-round, Kauai still enjoys a change of seasons, including dry and rainy periods. This cycle of life helps to keep the Garden Isle fertile and productive.

What We Do

The process starts with a request by our scientists for the farm to plant a certain crop for one of our research projects. All of our cropping practices and procedures used on the farm first and foremost must meet our high sustainability, stewardship and safety requirements.

Even before planting a field, we locate it carefully so that the new crop will not be near an older field with the same crop. That way, we see the least possible insect pressure, and can reduce the amount of pesticide that should be needed. Also, we only apply pesticides when

there is an observed need, not according to a preset schedule. By only using pesticides when they are absolutely needed, the number of applications is substantially reduced. In addition, we only prepare the amount of ground that is needed to grow the crop required for the research project. If one acre has been requested then we prepare one acre. This practice reduces fossil fuel use, reduces soil runoff and erosion, and reduces dust.

Once a crop is planted, we use drip irrigation, which delivers the right amount of water right where the plant needs it. By irrigating under the soil surface, we virtually eliminate wasted water compared to above-ground, overhead irrigation, which is subject to wind drift and evaporation. Similarly, we use liquid fertilizers delivered directly to the plants’ root systems, eliminating waste produced by granular fertilizer applications.

Once a crop is harvested and the seeds have been carefully processed and sent to the BASF research labs back on the mainland, the field is plowed under and allowed to sit for a period of time. This is a typical farming process where the leftover seeds are allowed to germinate, after which the field will be plowed under again, making way for a “clean” field for the next crop planting season. So it is not unusual that from time to time you may see bare fields visible in some areas of the farm. They are not dead fields, nor are they being neglected. They are doing their job at that given time.

Year-round, we have conservation strips, typically grasses, planted around all of our fields. Those areas and the use of cover crops in unused fields prevent runoff into drainage ditches and prevent erosion during heavy rains.

The bottom line: We’re very proud of the way we farm.

How We Serve

As active and engaged members of the community here on Kauai, we are your friends, your family, and your neighbors, working hard together to make the Garden Isle a better place for all.

Our people are involved in the community, contributing tirelessly to education, sports, public events, business and professional activities, and more. From judging science fairs, to coaching kids’ sports teams and sponsoring charity events, to participating in civic organizations such as the Rotary Club, the Kauai Workforce Investment Board and the West Kauai Business and Professional Association, we are out there giving back. You’ll see our folks and our banners at parades and other community events like the annual Kauai County Fair and the Fourth of July Celebration. We are also proud to lend our expertise to local career days and the annual Science Olympiad competition.

BASF is a member of the Kekaha Agriculture Association, the cooperative partnership among seed companies and small farmers that maintains the century-old system of irrigation and drainage on the West Side. The system is the legacy of long-gone sugar cane plantations, and without it, the West Side land would not be suitable for farming. Although average annual rainfall is just 13 inches, the area is quite susceptible to flooding during heavy rains, so maintaining the system of drainage ditches protects the land from damage, while also protecting the coastal ecosystem. The irrigation system, of course, provides access to vital water resources for all of the agricultural operations in the area. With the participation of small farmers and large companies, we are all working together to sustain Kauai’s agricultural community.

