

Market Link

for primary producers

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

Inside this issue

SPECIAL FEATURES	PAGE
'Ava Samoa (Kava)	1
Local Production	1
Growing Tips	2
Nurseries	3
Noble 'Ava Varieties	4
Samoa 'Ava Standard and Regulation	4
Market Access	5
OUR REGULAR FEATURES	
Prices of Ag commodities at Fugalei Market	6
Foreign Exchange Rate	6

extraction of 'ava roots and/or rhizomes with cold water and consumption fresh².

When Samoan people talk about the genealogy of the kava, or 'ava, they are referring to the origin of the kava and how it spread around the Samoan Islands. "Kava" refers to both the plant and the drink that is made from it. The plant was used in connection with religious rituals³. Ava plays a vital role in ceremonies and the social way of life or fa'asamoa. For instance, the Ava ceremony is one of the most elaborated rituals of welcome and worship in Samoan culture.

'AVA SAMOA (KAVA)



Kava (*Piper methysticum*), also known as 'ava in Samoa, has been cultivated across Oceania for over 3,000 years¹. The 'ava is a native species of the southwestern Pacific, where it has been consumed by Pacific Island Countries for centuries. Its traditional preparation involves the

LOCAL PRODUCTION

Holdings growing Ava	Upolu	Savaii
Ag Census 2009	775	1441
Ag Census 2019	548	818

Source: Agriculture Census 2019-2020

The Agriculture Census 2019-2020 has recorded a reduction in the number of holdings growing Ava in Samoa when compared to the number of holdings recorded in the Agriculture Census 2009. In addition, it is recorded that Savaii Island has the highest number of 'ava-farming holdings compared to those who do 'ava farming in Upolu.

¹ Indigenous anthropology and the kava myth in Manu'a

² Samoa 'Ava Standard 2018.

³ Indigenous anthropology and the kava myth in Manu'a

GROWING TIPS

⁴This is a very simplified guide to growing Ava in Samoa, and it focuses on repurposing or rejuvenating soil to re-establish fertile qualities required to grow kava successfully while using little or no imported fertilizer. Also, it can be followed to maintain soil fertility in land presently used for Ava farming.

Site Selection

Ava grows best from near sea level up to about 400m, in relatively deep, loose, fertile soil on sloping land so water does not pool, and dry El Niño years are a major threat to Ava; thus, it is important to plant shade trees that are not trimmed until the rainy seasons. Ava does not produce deep roots; thus, creating and maintaining soil fertility of the top layer is vital to gaining a high yield of Ava roots.

Ava supporting trees such as Gatae, Dadap, Erythrina variegates should be planted at 8-10m spacing to provide shade and improve soil fertility. If a lot of earthworms are present, it indicates that Ava will grow well, provided the soil fertility and moisture are well maintained.

Soil Fertility

Samoa has geologically young volcanic soils, which are generally rocky; topsoil can be deep in areas but varies according to lava substrata, making it difficult to achieve the long root system associated with Vanuatu or Fiji kava. Newly cleared forest has been the best way to produce vigorous growth in Ava plants due to the high fertility, but cutting down forest is not a sustainable method on our small islands.

When preparing planting plots, try to disturb the soil as little as possible; only dig up rocks necessary to lightly loosen soil for 'Ava planting. This way, the soil is least disturbed and able to quickly help new Ava roots gain all nutrients needed to grow strongly, thus resisting disease and growing beautifully strong. Digging deep and turning the soil upside down is going to mess up the natural arrangement, which then takes time to re-establish, so it will be slow to provide ideal growing conditions for your seedling roots to develop rapidly.

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 directly planted in the field. However, direct planting has been found less useful for such reasons:

- Requires more planting materials and longer pieces
- Ava cuttings require moist conditions at the 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.

⁴ MDF Kava growing guide

Harvesting

Ava is harvested after 4 years of planting. Some 'ava expert growers believed that the longer period the 'ava grows, the better quality it will produce, hence higher concentrations of kavalactones. Kava lactones are the active compounds in kava. Harvesting is a job that requires patience and a gold digger's mindset because the roots fetch a higher price and have the highest kava lactone contents.

Pest, Diseases and Weather

Cucumber Mosaic Virus (CMV) – also known as the cause of Kava Dieback disease, certain plants host CMV; these are bananas, cucumbers, tomatoes, pumpkins, tobacco, corn and others. If possible, they should not be planted with Ava. This disease seems endemic in the kava around Samoa; thus, even when healthy planting material is used, kava can develop CMV if stressed, the best defence is to take every action to ensure strong, healthy-growing Ava crops.

African snail – this is a major problem in most areas, especially for young or sprouting plants. Although snail pellets are the only solution at present, if you have ducks, they will eat snail eggs, juvenile snails and slugs, reducing the problem. Also, ducks do not scratch and dig up soil as chickens do. Also, flatworms kill African snails.

Ants – especially an introduced variety known as the Singapore ant – have a symbiotic relation with mealybugs, which are sap-eating, causing damage to the skin of a plant, allowing CMV to enter, which results in Ava dieback. Ant sand needs to be mixed with icing sugar to ensure ants take the bait to their nest thus destroying the colony, unfortunately regular treatment is

necessary due the prevalence of ant colonies. Areas with the native large black ants (Loata) remain free of this pest.

Nematodes – these are not visible to the eye but the damage. Unfortunately, to see especially in the roots due to get lumpy and rotten, it seems the damage is often worse after 4 years, nematode damage allows fungi and other insects to attack roots and stump resulting in substandard ava making it unsuitable for the export market. Some varieties of nematodes can be discouraging (Loata)ing turmeric near Ava, this is a good secondary crop but caution must be exercised if harvested before the ava as damage to ava roots must be avoided.

Kava weevil – is sometimes found in the stump and can allow fungi to establish, ruining quality, vigorous growth and harvesting. Around 4 years reduces this and most other Ava farming problems.

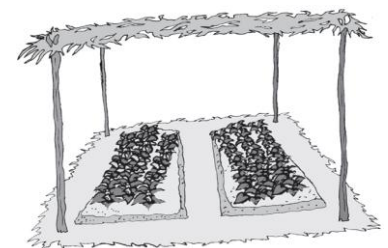
Dry Weather - is the enemy of Ava, so it is important to be aware of the general annual weather conditions in your area, for example. Asau can experience very dry weather from July through to October, September is usually the driest month for Samoa.

NURSERIES

⁵Nurseries are adequately shaded to promote development and prevent the cuttings from drying out.

Ava nursery methods:

1. Planting one or two nodes in cuttings in nursery bed

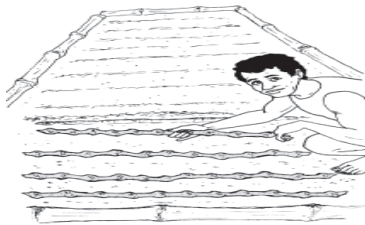


⁵ Atina'eina o le 'Ava leaflet

2. Planting one or two node cuttings in plastic bags



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



NOBLE 'AVA VARIETY

⁶According to the Ava Regulation 2018, a noble 'ava variety is any 'ava variety that has a certain chemical composition adequate for daily human consumption and drinking and has a long history of safe traditional use in Samoa. The noble 'ava varieties are

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

SAMOA 'AVA STANDARD AND REGULATION

Moving forward, Samoa aims to revive the production of Ava in Samoa. In order to do so, the first-ever Ava standard and regulation were produced for guidance. The aim is to ensure that Samoan kava is

produced and stored according to good hygiene standards while maintaining its quality so that it is safe for consumption and is internationally recognized as a quality product.



Samoa 'Ava Standard 2018

⁷The Food ('Ava) Regulations 2018 regulate the preparations, sales, and processing of 'ava or kava. It specifies that 'ava must consist only of permitted, noble varieties of the *Piper methysticum* plant. It mandates strict hygiene and quality standards, specifically requiring that the beverage be prepared using only clean water and fresh, unpeeled 'ava roots or peeled rhizomes. The regulation works in tandem with the Samoa 'ava Standard 2018 to prevent contamination and guarantee that 'ava sold in domestic and international markets is safe and high quality.



Food ('Ava) Regulations 2018

⁶ Samoa 'Ava Standard 2018.

⁷ Food ('Ava) Regulation 2018

MARKET ACCESS

Export Market.

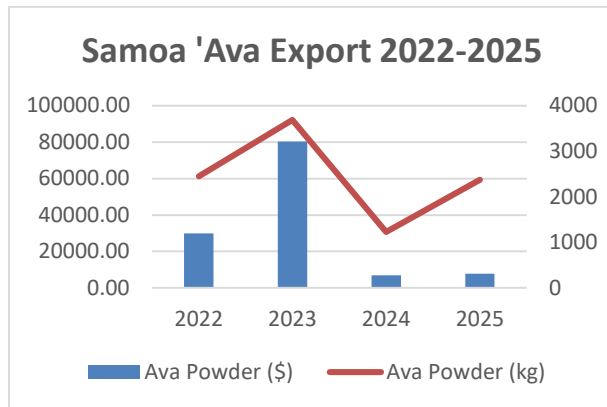


Figure 1: Samoa 'Ava Export 2022-2025

Figure 1 shows the trend of 'ava powder being exported to overseas markets from 2022 to 2025⁸. The figure above shows that 2023 has the highest value and volume of Samoa 'Ava being exported overseas. A large number was exported to American Samoa in 2023. Other countries such as the United States of America, New Zealand, and Australia had a few 'Ava exports. Also note a significant decline in the exportation of 'ava powder as recorded in 2024, with American Samoa still recorded as the leading country in the exportation of 'ava powder.

Local Market.

Local markets, retail stores, supermarkets, and small-scale shops are playing a huge role in selling Ava Samoa. Ava is mainly sold in packets (powder form), and it is being sold from \$10 to \$12 per packet. Ava is also being sold using a traditional cup (ipu ava) a mixture of water and 'ava powder form, and usually costs about \$2 or more per cup. The small-scale shops and supermarkets are 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 every supermarket, local market, and small-scale shop.



'Ava packet sold at a local market.

Way Forward

'Ava exports in Samoa fluctuate from time to time as shown by the trend in Figure #, but there is great potential for growth not only for the export market but for the local markets as well.

The initiation of the 'Ava Standard and Regulation is a great contribution to the industry, where farmers will use it for guidance.

⁹ Additionally, there is a high demand for 'ava powder by our overseas markets, and also there is still ongoing supply or exportation of 'ava to date, but the challenge that is faced by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is not enough supply of 'ava from the 'ava growers or farmers.

⁸ Trade data from Samoa Bureau of Statistics

⁹ Savali Newspaper (11th July 2026)

Table1: Average Prices at the Fugalei Market

Commodities (SAT\$/kg)	March 2026	April 2026	May 2026	Lowest Price for 2026 to date	Highest Price for 2026 to date
Taro	4.54	4.72	4.16	4.16	4.72
Banana	1.88	1.78	2.03	1.78	2.03
Ta'amu	5.44	4.89	4.36	3.46	5.44
Coconut	1.10	1.17	1.09	1.03	1.17
Breadfruit	1.46	2.41	1.85	1.46	2.41
Yam	16.37	7.78	6.90	5.46	16.37
Head Cabbage	12.47	14.11	15.51	8.81	15.51
Tomato	32.39	30.09	37.11	22.19	37.11
Chinese Cabbage	13.57	12.58	15.15	12.58	15.15
Cucumber	9.96	9.83	10.67	8.59	10.67
Pumpkin	6.33	6.75	6.64	5.62	6.75

Source: Samoa Bureau of Statistics

Table 2: Foreign Currency per Tala (SAT\$)

July 2026	USD\$	NZD\$	AUD\$	YEN\$	FJD\$	EURO
1 Samoan Tala SAT\$=	0.36	0.61	0.51	58	0.78	0.31

Source: Bank of the South Pacific

Market Link Newsletter

This newsletter is published quarterly 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, Sector Coordination and Communication Division and ask for Fereni Tofilau.

Disclaimer

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Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
P.O Box 1874
Phone: (685) 22 561, (685) 22562
Email: fereni.tofilau@maf.gov.ws

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