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Pearl Farmers are a Resilient Lot

Farming pearls is a labor of love for most entrepreneurs these days. The risks so often outweigh the rewards. Japan's akoya pearl farms have been hit repeatedly in the last 20 years with natural and manmade disasters, China's akoya farms have been **devastated twice** in the past two years and their freshwater farms are **plagued with pollution**. Tahitian pearl prices have ridden a roller coaster ride for the last 20 years, going from prices higher than Paspaley production to lower than a farm-sustaining level. The trade is wrought with uncertainty and impending disaster.

But to a special group of farmers, there is that labor of love and a never-ending passion and hope that keeps their spirits alive and helps them thrive through diversity.



Justin Hunter

Three farmers come immediately to mind: Edward Kong, Douglas McLaurin and Justin Hunter.

Edward Kong is the farmer in Malaysia we just discussed a couple of days ago, and Douglas is the principal of [Sea of Cortez Pearls](#). For both of them, farming pearls is not about the money. It is about the pride and the passion.

And then there is Justin Hunter.

In 2000, Justin Hunter returned home to Fiji from the United States and established [J. Hunter Pearls Fiji](#). Farming pearl with the *Pinctada margaritifera* shell, one would expect his small upstart to pale in comparison to the big boys of French Polynesia. But Justin has a dream – a dream to grow pearls that looked completely different than the traditional Tahitian.

Justin's pearls are different. Their colors show a range not typically seen in French Polynesia. The golds, pistachios and blues are more the norm than the exception.



So what makes

Justin so different? Just today he was featured in [The Fiji Times Online](#). The global economic depression has so many scrambling, scared to death. Even the mighty Paspaley is feeling the pain with worries about the current crisis and falling sales. But for Justin, the global crisis is not dampening his optimism. He is already planning a second farm in Buca Bay.

Some may wonder how he can afford it. Tahitian pearl prices are lower than ever and

the market is soft. But Hunter Pearls has been controlling the market. His pearls are unique. They're special. His auctions are attended by hand-picked buyers. He selects the quality- and rarity-based buyers like [Vock](#), and refuses other dollar-based buyers like Druzy. His auctions sell out and his harvests command a premium.

It is the love of the art, the passion for the game, combined with a strong marketing skill that sets him apart from the rest. When the world wakes up and the buyers return, it is easy to assume Justin will be leading the pack – at least in his own small niche.

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