



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
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By

Rachel Novotny, Interim Dean

And

J. Kenneth Grace, Associate Dean
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 356 – RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Riviere, and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and the Environment:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 356, which appropriates funds to the Department of Agriculture to establish and support a farmer apprentice mentoring program, with successful commercial farmers serving as mentors.

Successful farmers have a great deal to contribute to mentoring the next generation of farmers, but as small businessmen usually cannot afford the time necessary to do this. The intent of this bill, reflecting the desire of the farming community, is to set up a means of grant administration within the Department of Agriculture to support a mentoring program in each county by successful commercial farmers, based on the pilot program developed by the Hawai'i Farmers Union on Maui, as an alternative or adjunct to the more formal and structured educational programs offered by the University of Hawai'i, such as the GoFarm Hawai'i program directed by the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) and the community colleges. Although we defer to the Department of Agriculture on the fiscal and management implications of SB 356, we believe that this is a practical approach for creation and management of a grants program to support on-farm mentoring by working farmers. CTAHR and other units of the University of Hawai'i will be glad to collaborate with the Department of Agriculture in matters such as curriculum design.

Hawai'i needs more successful farmers, and those who are successful certainly have expertise to share. The purpose of the bill is to engage commercial farmers in individualized, on-farm mentoring of new farmers by providing them with a financial incentive to do so. We support the goal of SB 356 of a farmer apprentice mentoring program as a path to new farmer success.