HB3218: RELATING TO GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

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by

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I am pleased to contribute the expertise of the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) to the decision-making process on House Bill 3218, which requires persons proposing to engage in research, testing, propagating, cultivating, and growing GMOs to notify DOH and obtain a certification from DOH.

Since initial commercialization in 1996, global planted area of genetically engineered (GE) crops has increased by more than fifty-fold from 4.2 million acres in six countries to 222 million acres in 21 countries in 2005. Up to this point, no adverse effects on human health from GE plants have occurred.

In the US, growing, propagating, and cultivating of crops is already subject to stringent and comprehensive standards established by three federal agencies: the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). During the development of GE crop plants, USDA regulates their interstate movement and field testing. If the results of regulated research and testing indicate that the release of a GE crop will not cause adverse effects to other plants, non-target (i.e., non-pest) organisms, or the environment, USDA is authorized to de-regulate the GE crop. For GE crops that produce biological pesticides, EPA establishes the level of pesticide that is safe for the environment and for human consumption. If the GE crop is to be consumed by people or animals, FDA participates in the regulatory process.

At the state level, we already have the Hawai‘i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) interacting with USDA, commenting on permit applications for testing of regulated GE crops, and participating in site inspections at testing locations. HDOA provides USDA with science-based input on applications to permit the planting of regulated GE crops. USDA works to resolve and mitigate concerns expressed by HDOA prior to the issuance of a GE crop permit.

This bill will require all research, whether in the test tube, greenhouse or open field, to go through a review and certification process. This will be a tremendous number of projects
to review. Requiring certification for all GMO research and testing would place a heavy burden on organizations conducting GE research and the Hawaii Department of Health, which does not have the breadth of expertise nor the resources to manage such a certification process. Passing this bill will also duplicate much of what is currently being done by federal and state agencies.

We oppose HB3218 based on the fact that human health and environmental safety are best served by one set of rigorous national regulations for the production GE crops rather than a patchwork of regulations that vary from state to state. In addition, the proposed review and certification process will require a tremendous amount of time and resources that are not warranted.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.