Testimony Presented Before the
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Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1273, Relating to Appropriations, which appropriates $500,000 to the University of Hawai‘i’s Cooperative Extension Service, in the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR), to support the growth and sustainability of the agriculture industry. I am Sylvia Yuen, the Interim Dean and Director of CTAHR.

The Cooperative Extension Service has a long history of disseminating research-based information to farmers, food processors, and others in the field to promote the growth and sustainability of the agriculture industry. This is an extremely important role, as Hawai‘i’s agriculture is characterized by many small farmers and food producers who depend on CTAHR for their R&D (research and development) because they do not have the economy of scale and means to hire their own scientists. To illustrate, 64.0% of the farms in Hawai‘i are comprised of less than 10 acres, compared with 10.6% in the nation as a whole. There is also a greater need for Cooperative Extension Services today than in the past, as producing food to ensure Hawai‘i’s food sufficiency and safety now requires more knowledge and skills. For example, there are more federal and State regulations to meet; more technology to master; more information about data, markets, and best practices to learn; and more management of energy, production, and other costs. These demands can be overwhelming, particularly for those who have limited education and are non- or limited-English speakers.

In addition, Hawai‘i is vulnerable to invasions by insects, disease-bearing organisms, snakes, weeds, and other pests that threaten our agricultural industries. For example, in the last few months the coffee berry borer and basil downy mildew have been found in our state and are causing serious harm to industries that contribute millions of dollars to Hawai‘i’s economy. CTAHR’s Cooperative Extension Service has been instrumental in addressing and controlling the damage caused by these pests: identifying the insect or pathogen, developing educational materials for dissemination, conducting workshops for growers, and partnering with the Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Agriculture to implement the best strategies to control and mitigate the problems.
The appropriation will enable the Cooperative Extension Service to fill critical personnel gaps and enhance its services throughout the state to support the growth and sustainability of the agriculture industry. We support HB 1273 provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in the University’s Board of Regents Approved Executive Biennium Budget.