



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Hawaiian Affairs  
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by  
James R Gaines  
Vice President for Research, University of Hawai'i

### SB 709, SD2 RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

The University of Hawaii (UH) is sensitive to and mindful of the spiritual and cultural significance of taro in Hawaii. By releasing its patents on disease resistant, traditionally cross-bred, hybrid taro into the public domain and entering into an agreement to consult with the Hawaiian community before conducting any research on genetically engineered Hawaiian taro, the University has demonstrated not only its respect for the cultural significance of Hawaiian taro, but also its desire to expand and enhance its interactions with Hawaiian taro farmers and the native Hawaiian community.

UH is working on many fronts to establish a working relationship with the taro farming community, including, among other efforts, its participation on the Taro Task Force. That Task Force, created by the Legislature as Act 211 in 2008, is currently meeting and driving positive dialogue to address the multitude of threats to Hawaiian taro. We believe it would be prudent for this Legislature to examine the outcomes of the Taro Task Force's efforts before supporting any further legislation regarding taro.

Testimony to this legislature from taro farmers, the Hawaiian community, and the Department of Agriculture indicate that the primary threats to taro in Hawaii come from invasive species and diseases associated with imported taro and issues related to agriculture in general such as access to land, reduced numbers of farmers, water quality, loi health, etc. Taro research is not the problem. The continued introduction of bills such as this does little to protect taro or assist in building collaborative relationships between UH and the taro farming community. Not only do bills of this nature continue to divide people who need to be working together to address real problems facing taro production in Hawaii, but they perpetuate ignorance of science and unfounded fears of new technologies that may, even indirectly, come to bear on solutions to the problems facing taro in Hawaii.

In closing, UH reiterates that it is not now, nor does it have plans to genetically engineer Hawaiian taro. UH has an agreement in place with the Hawaiian community regarding genetic engineering of taro and has every intention of upholding the terms of that agreement. UH will continue to participate in the Taro Task Force with the hope that the work we do as a world leader in tropical agricultural research will contribute to the preservation of the cultural and genetic integrity of kalo and support taro farmers in their efforts to meet current and new, value-added market demands.

The University of Hawaii opposes passage of SB 709SD2. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.