



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

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HB 450 – RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL EMERGENCIES

Chair Creagan, Vice Chair DeCoite and members of the House Committee on Agriculture:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of HB 450 relating to agricultural emergencies. We respectfully provide the following information to substantiate our position.

Section 141-A Agricultural emergencies: 2018 was a difficult year for agriculture. Torrential rains hurt the taro and ornamental plant industries on Kaua'i and O'ahu. Volcanic eruption decimated approximately 50% of the papaya industry and severely hurt the orchid industry, while also having a negative effect on the bee industry. Multiple hurricanes compounded the problems as did frequent wildfires. Hawai'i needs to be prepared for the certain eventuality that this is a foreboding of disasters to come as our climate continues to change due to human influence.

We support the process that allows an agricultural emergency to be declared. Having people knowledgeable about agriculture in Hawai'i, as is found on the Board of Agriculture, Department of Agriculture (DOA), making a recommendation on what is considered an emergency, puts the initial recommendation with agriculturalists that represent a wide swath of the industry and university. The final declaration of an emergency then rests with the governor.

Section 141-B Agricultural emergency trust fund: The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) strongly supports the development of a trust fund outside the state treasury. The ability to quickly react to emergencies is crucial to being effective in an emergency.

We fear that without this fund, and with increasing climate change influences in our future, agriculture in the most isolated population center on the planet depends on a rapid response and on actions that get agricultural production of safe food going as soon as possible.

The reasons for supporting an agricultural emergency fund are:

1. With increased occurrence and strength of storms (including hurricanes) Hawai'i should expect to see increased damage to the state's agricultural industry.
2. With an emphasis on Hawai'i producing more of its own food for the purpose of self-sufficiency, food quality, and food safety; agricultural emergencies as we have seen in 2018 work against those ideas and hurt the state's agricultural economy.
3. Individual farmers are often incapable of overcoming devastating effects such as what happened in 2018, and could use support in preventing these effects from happening; and then having help during defined emergencies.

Two current examples of the problem exist from the 2018 climate and volcanic episodes. The torrential rains washed out newly planted taro crops and/or covered over existing production with silt and debris. There is a need to provide new and better taro varieties to the growers. CTAHR, working with DOA, has been growing new material, but it takes time. With more available funding, CTAHR could have reacted faster and more effectively to help Hawai'i's agriculture.

For the papaya industry, there is an inadequate supply of seed to replant the acreage lost when lava covered over a large portion of the papaya plantations. Again, working with limited resources, the DOA and CTAHR are collaborating to grow more seed, but the ability to do so will run out in June 2019. If there had been an emergency fund, and an emergency declared, additional acreage to grow more seed could have been located resulting in a more diverse and greater quantity of seed to replant the industry in the future.

In summary, both 141-A, and B are well-designed to declare an emergency and respond to one.

Section 141-1 Duties in general: This section requires the collaboration of UHM/CTAHR in the areas of entomology, plant pathology, and edible/non-edible crops through the Agricultural Experiment Station and the Cooperative Extension Service. UHM/CTAHR supports this approach and stands ready to cooperate through research and extension. UHM/CTAHR has extension agents across all counties and each has some level of state-wide responsibility.

Our experience with DOA has been positive and collaborative and we are looking forward to keeping that relationship open through HB 450.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB 450.