



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
And

Senate Committee on Higher Education
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SB 261 – RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Chairs Gabbard and Kim, Vice Chairs Ruderman and Kidani and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment and Committee on Higher Education:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 261 relating to agriculture and addressing funding for the GoFarm Hawai'i (GFH) program. We respectfully provide the following information to substantiate our position.

Over 85% of farmers in Hawai'i earn less than \$50,000 per year. To increase local food production, support is needed to develop financially viable farming operations. Existing farms must increase yield and new farmers focused on commercial production must be trained in all aspects of successful agribusiness. GFH is able to assist with both.

Started in 2004, GFH's AgBusiness team provides business consulting and support services to local agricultural businesses including farmers and value-added producers. Over the past 3 years, the team has provided one-on-one consulting to an average of 88 companies per year statewide.

The AgBusiness team also provides business education to aspiring and established farmers throughout the state. In 2018 alone, 260 attended training sessions.

GFH currently operates 5 training sites on 4 islands.

Since offering beginning farmer training in 2013, over 300 have been trained in the basics of farming and over 100 have been trained for small-scale commercial agriculture.

Of the 138 graduates in the past 3 years, 49% started their own farm business and 22% started working for other companies in the agricultural industry. This program is clearly meeting the training needs of Hawaiian agriculture.

Program students and graduates produced over 100,000 pounds of food in the last year.

While the program is within CTAHR, it started, and has continued, as a program completely funded by grants from a diverse group of organizations. As past funding sources are no longer available, the CTAHR budget is not able to fund what was a soft-money program through its normal budget. Therefore, this bill was initiated.

There is a need to train new farmers in a cost-effective way. The GFH program, at a reasonable cost to the student, is a type of bootcamp for people interested in learning farming skills; from growing to marketing. The program also, as noted, provides expertise to farmers who request it. With an annual budget projected at \$1.4 million dollars, funds are needed to support this valuable program; and this bill addresses that need. The inevitable outcome of lack of funding is to reduce the program, which works against the state's stated need to train new farmers.

We support this bill provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our Board of Regents Approved Budget

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.