



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance
Friday, March 29, 2019 at 2:00 p.m.

By
Nicholas Comerford
Dean, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources
And
Michael Bruno
Interim Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
Vice Chancellor for Research
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 375 SD2 HD1 – RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Chair Luke, Vice Chair Cullen and members of the House Committee on Finance:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 375 SD2 HD1 relating to agriculture.

For several years there has been a goal of doubling food production by 2020, and now this measure changes the date to achieve this goal to 2030. Regardless of the date to reach the goal of doubling food production, the approach of how to accomplish this has been poorly defined. Now is a good time to remedy that situation. Hawai'i agriculture is at a crossroads where it is searching for what agriculture will look like into the future, and how this island state, remote from the rest of world, can do a better job of growing its own food. This becomes particularly important when we look at the disasters that befell agriculture in 2018, and the expectation that climate change will continue to disrupt crop production and the import of food.

The approach is not just how to grow more food, but where to grow, what kind of food and in what quantities. We believe that one first starts with supplying a defined population with the proper nutrition. Having determined that, what are the crops (including crops that meet cultural demands) that can be grown, where can they be grown, and in what quantities should they be grown to meet the identified nutrition needs. This is a healthy food approach.

Then one must ask what are the economic incentives, transportation needs, product price points, and markets that will control the farmers ability to profitably grow what is needed. Other questions that affect the outcome of such a plan are: what is the role, if any, of the very small farmer; what are the mechanisms for aggregating the small farmers so they can meet an economy of scale; how do the food security regulations

control the outcome of this evaluation? For example, what is the role of protected agriculture in doubling food production since the state receives approximately one invasive species per day? Low tunnels, high tunnels, shade houses and greenhouses will play a role. One can envision greenhouse ecosystems with highly trained labor producing at unprecedented levels with low, but highly trained, labor inputs. When crops are grown on the approximately 150,000 acres of quality crop land, we envision a multi-level GIS system that combines soil, water availability, climate parameters, economics, and more, to assist farmers in deciding what crops grow best in that soil, and what will be the best economic return on a cropping system choice given the current market conditions.

CTAHR supports the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (DOA) in the development of such a plan and is willing to assist where we can.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 375 SD2 HD1. However, we defer to the testimony of DOA as to the feasibility of this bill relative to their manpower and proposed funding to accomplish the task.