



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

---

Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment  
Friday, February 5, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.

By  
Nicholas Comerford, Dean  
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

### SB 512 – RELATING TO SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM INCENTIVES

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Nishihara, and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the general intent of SB 512 relating to augmenting access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR), by way of its Human Nutrition program, has responsibility for SNAP Education via the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), CTAHR Cooperative Extension Service. Therefore, CTAHR has a vested interest in this bill as it will affect our educational programs.

The State of Hawai'i, by initiating the Double Up Food Bucks program, made a significant impact on the health, nutrition, and poverty of citizens of Hawai'i. This current bill expands the value of the Double Up Food Bucks program by allowing recipients to use SNAP funds at a farmer's market, farm stand, mobile market, a community-supported agriculture project, grocery store or other direct retailer. Expanding access will only further assist those in need by making available more sources of nutritious food; while supporting Hawai'i agriculture. We recommend language be added to expand the use of SNAP resources at any of the food outlets mentioned above, when they are compliant with the food safety criteria of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Otherwise, the health objective of this bill could be compromised.

The bill's language says that the SNAP match can be used exclusively to buy Hawai'i-grown fresh fruits and vegetables. This puts an unrealistic onus on the recipient to search out specific sources of food. The primary purpose of the SNAP program is to effect the health and nutrition of those experiencing hard times. That should remain the main purpose of the SNAP and the Double Bucks program. We believe that assisting Hawai'i agriculture will be an obvious outcome when Hawai'i agriculture enhances its crop production.

UHM and CTAHR supports the intent of SB 512, but provides comments relative to food safety and the requirement to buy only Hawai'i-grown produce.

The University supports the intent of this bill as described above but is aware of the current financial climate of the State of Hawai'i and realizes that state funding is reduced. For the next fiscal biennium, the University of Hawai'i Board of Regents approved a budget request for the University that was flat, and did not seek any increased funding to the University. UH defers to the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture on their priorities.