



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
and

Senate Committee on Hawaiian Affairs
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SCR 246/SR 205 – REQUESTING THAT A WORKING GROUP BE CONVENED TO DEVELOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE REVITALIZING ECONOMY AND AGRICULTURE LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

Chairs Gabbard and Shimabukuro, Vice Chairs Nishihara and Keohokalole, and members of the Senate Committees on Agriculture and Environment and Hawaiian Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on SCR 246 / SR 205. We neither support nor oppose the measure because there seems much to be clarified before we can do so.

We support the need to improve agriculture in Hawai'i; the use of a working group to provide recommendations on how to make that happen; and, the use of well-documented farming practices that improve soil health, and that make farming economically viable.

We understand that a working group is being asked to provide recommendations to move forward a specific initiative named “Revitalizing Economy and Agriculture Leadership (REAL)”. However, significant parts of the resolution should first be clarified:

1. The term restorative agriculture is not a term in common use. It is not common in the refereed literature or on the internet. It would be useful to define the meaning of the term. Subsequent comments are based on the assumption that the meaning is in the same vein as regenerative agriculture. Regenerative agriculture is based in the use of best management practices to promote sustainability, including economic viability. We support the promotion of best management practices that focus on developing soil health and that produce an economically viable farm.
2. The resolution states that restorative agriculture increases food production by 100%. We are not familiar with a body of work that supports this statement.

However, we are familiar with research that shows that the use of practices often used in regenerative agriculture – when used appropriately and expertly, can reduce the cost of inputs and increase the economic return to a farming operation. They may also have a positive effect on production.

3. We are not familiar with the initiative described in the resolution entitled: “Revitalizing Economy and Agriculture Leadership (REAL)”. It may be useful to state where this initiative comes from as we cannot find anyone with whom we often deal with in agriculture that has heard of it.

The resolution describes this initiative as requiring “immediate attention, action, and collaboration...”. It describes that it is already under way, and describes 3 phases of activity. By following the timeline outlined in the resolution, phases 1 and 2 would be over by the time the working group’s recommendations were reported to the legislature. Phase three would also be over by the time recommendations could have an effect. It seems reasonable then to clarify how the timeline of activity and the working group recommendations interact.

In summary, we support bringing together a diverse group of experts to evaluate and recommend action for a common problem. We also recognize that the pandemic has seriously cut into the personnel capital of the organizations mentioned, affecting their ability to engage with this resolution. So, while we defer to the organizations as to their ability to participate on such a task force, particularly in light of the numerous agriculture task forces being recommended, we support participating in this one if it is clear that the effort would result in timely recommendations; that we understand what is meant by restorative agriculture; and that we better understand the origin and the meaning of the REAL initiative.