UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I SYSTEM

TESTIMONY

HB 353

Making an Appropriation for Organic Agriculture

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Agriculture

February 2, 2005

by

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Chancellor, Leeward Community College
University of Hawai‘i

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Chair Abinsay and Members of the Committee:

I am here to testify in support of the intent of H.B. 353 that makes an appropriation of funds to the University of Hawai`i to support the establishment of an organic agriculture center and improve food security in Wai`anae.

The University of Hawai`i Leeward Community College (LCC) entered into partnership with the Wai`anae Organic Agriculture Center program in 2002. The impetus for collaboration was an opportunity to secure funding from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of University Partnership (OUP) Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Institutions Assisting Communities program (AN/NHIAC). The objective of the HUD-funded project was to stabilize the successful MA'O Farm startup by securing both land and infrastructure required to give the program a permanent home and to strengthen and expand LCC's involvement with Wai`anae Coast communities. The program was recently recognized by Senator Daniel Inouye and HUD OUP Deputy Assistant Secretary for University Partnerships Armand Carrier as one of the most successful AN/NHIAC programs in Hawai`i.

The Wai`anae Coast Redevelopment Corporation's (WCRC) *Mala 'Ai 'Opio*: Community Food Security Initiative (Wai`anae Organic Agriculture Center) is working to

create comprehensive programs to support and promote diversified agriculture. This is being accomplished within the context of a living farm complete with environmentally and culturally sustainable organic growing methods including food production, food processing, food wholesale and retail sales and micro-enterprise development.

The overall mission is to fight hunger and improve nutrition, strengthen local food security and empower low-income families to move towards self-sufficiency through sustainable and culturally appropriate economic opportunities. Special emphasis is placed upon identifying and serving at-risk and underrepresented students who are out of high school but who have not yet developed the skills to secure gainful employment in Hawai`i's expanding agriculture, biotechnology, food production, health, culinary, tourism industries and small business entrepreneurship.

By supporting community-based efforts to expand opportunities for local residents and small businesses to enter the agriculture marketplace, LCC and Wai`anae Organic Agriculture Center are making significant progress with regard to development of an important component of Hawai`i's economy, diversified agriculture. Moreover, by providing integrated training and education programs at the farm and at the college, Wai`anae Organic Agriculture Center and LCC are developing important gateway opportunities whereby otherwise at-risk youth are finding good opportunity and means of preparing to be successful in community college, and beyond.

In addition to adding to community support, LCC values this bill since LCC is planning to build upon its horticulture and nutrition initiatives that are already well underway. LCC has a native plants project, directed by Professor Priscilla Millen, that is quite extraordinary and it is looking for further maturation and definition. The fact that

the native plants project focuses on dry region plants overlaps geographically and strategically with the MA'O site. The farm site in Waianae is seen as a natural extension of a growing landscape, agricultural and horticultural set of activities on the Pearl City Campus. In addition, LCC has courses in Hawaiian nutrition and fitness issues; these courses are connecting nutrition to farming and also to native Hawaiian culture. Our nutrition faculty make use of farming sites as part of the course experience and are collaborating with MA'O along these lines. One, therefore, sees a triangulation of interests here that pivot off from the MA'O Farms support bill.

If the bill is passed with an appropriation, it should not displace items in the Board of Regent's approved University budget request.

Thank you for allowing me to testify on this bill.