



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Higher Education and Committee on Agriculture

February 2, 2007

by

Darren Okimoto

Extension Leader, Sea Grant College Program
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB935 Relating to Agriculture.

Chair Chang, Chair Tsuji and Members of the Committees:

Good afternoon. My name is Darren Okimoto and I am the Extension Leader for the University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program (UH Sea Grant). I am here today to offer testimony in support of the adoption of HB935.

UH Sea Grant conducts research and outreach efforts to promote economic, cultural and environmentally sustainable aquaculture activities that reduce pressure on capture fisheries and meet the increasing demand for seafood. As you are aware, Sea Grant aquaculture extension activities are jointly funded through the State of Hawai'i Aquaculture Development Program, and focus on industry development to diversify the State's economy.

Continued support from the state is vital to maintaining the high level of commitment that Sea Grant made to serve the aquaculture stakeholders in Hawai'i. We currently support five aquaculture extension specialists and agents who are based throughout the main Hawaiian Islands and engage in activities that promote and develop one of the fastest growing sectors of diversified agriculture in our state. These funds will be matched by federal funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, United States Department of Agriculture and Maui County.

With uncertainty surrounding the federal budget process, the state can help to ensure the viability of its aquaculture industry by supporting the passage of HB935.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill, provided that its passage does not supplant the Board of Regents approved Biennium Budget request.

If it pleases the Chairs, I would like to submit as part of the written record a letter of support from Mr. John Corbin, the former manager of the Aquaculture Development Program. In his letter, Mr. Corbin offers his perspective on the fruitful partnership that has developed between Sea Grant and the Aquaculture Development Program, as well as references significant extension activities that Sea Grant has contributed in the past project year.



State of Hawaii
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Aquaculture Development Program
1177 Alakea Street #400
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

December 27, 2006

Dr. Darren K. Okimoto
Extension Leader
University of Hawaii
Sea Grant College Program
2525 Correa Road, HIG 238
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822

Dear Dr. Okimoto:

I am pleased to comment on the importance of the University of Hawaii (UH) Sea Grant (SG) Aquaculture Extension Program to the past and future development of the Hawaii industry. To offer some perspective, the Aquaculture Development Program (ADP) and the University of Hawaii Sea Grant College Program partnered to create the first Aquaculture Extension Agent position in the early 1980's and we have remained cost-sharing collaborators since that time despite periodic shifts in the budgets of both programs. The program provides essential, on-site, "hands-on" technical assistance and technology transfer to aquafarmers on all islands. As you know, the aquaculture industry is very diverse in species and technologies and most farmers don't have the full complement of knowledge and skills to manage all the problems they are likely to see in starting and operating a farm.

The program has evolved with the growth of the industry from \$500,000 in sales in 1979 to \$28.4 million in sales in 2005. In recent years it has provided financial support for three, very knowledgeable Ph.D. level agents (one based on Oahu, one on the Big Island, and one for Maui County on Maui). Overall from the ADP side, we manage these technical extension capabilities and the development services provided by ADP, as an Extension Advisory Network; with certain important expertise residing in certain individuals and with the ability to respond quickly statewide because staff is on island. The current staffing and coverage has provided in particular outstanding support to the Neighbor Islands, which were neglected in earlier years.

Any reduction of the extension services supported by the SG/ADP partnership will have major negative consequences on the aquaculture industry considering the long history of service. To highlight several potential impact areas that would be of major State concern:

- a) There will be fewer start-ups and more farm failures due to limited technical back up support, resulting in slow or no industry growth. No growth means declines in local seafood production (more imports) and job generation, particularly in rural areas with high unemployment.



- b) Limited availability of skilled extension personnel in place will remove an incentive to investors in aquaculture and a competitive advantage for the State.
- c) These extension personnel have been very successful in leveraging additional non-ADP and non-Sea Grant funds to address industry research needs and these important grant development capabilities would be lost. In recent years, ADP and Sea Grant funds leverage \$200,000 to \$300,000 a year additional funding.
- d) Any reduced extension capability will reduce the ability to respond to farmer requests for assistance in a timely fashion, as well as the occasional help offered to non-profits and various high schools that have aquaculture curriculum.

For reference consider the important support activities carried out by the SG/ADP Aquaculture Extension staff in the most recent project year, March 2005 to February 2006. Consider the following activities:

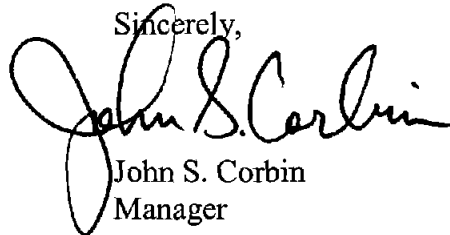
- a) Responded to over 1,000 requests for technical assistance in the form of verbal conversations, providing of written information, and site visits during the reporting period. These activities are done in collaboration with two other specialists located on the other islands and ADP staff. For example, staff provided technical assistance on culture technology and assisted in developing tours (e.g., photos, handouts) for a seahorse farm, Ocean Rider Inc., Kailua-Kona. Staff also helped five high school students with science fair projects and produced a monthly newsletter.
- b) Maintained an extramural funding portfolio of over \$300,000 to conduct basic and applied research on a host of topics. Extension specialists carried out short-term, applied research projects in such areas as: diseases of kahala, ciguatera fish poisoning, management of tilapia stocks, and low salinity shrimp culture. In addition to the research being conducted, the projects directly support five graduate students and agents serve on the committees of ten graduate students.
- c) Helped organize and carry out a variety of influential meetings during the year.
 - 1. Marine Ornamentals 2006 Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada, February 13-16, 2006. Collaboration with ADP and several out-of-state partners.
 - 2. Served on Organizing Committee for 6th Annual Conference of the Hawaii Aquaculture Association (HAA) in 2005, attended by 125 participants. Also, served on the Board of Directors of the HAA.
 - 3. Served on an on-going basis as member of the National Aquaculture Extension Steering Committee to plan national conference of extension personnel.

4. Facilitated statewide stakeholders meeting of the Hawaii Shrimp Broodstock Industry to review health certification program.
5. Served on the Organizing Committee of the Hawaii Aquaculture Summit, which provided an all day forum for industry stakeholders to develop a strategic plan for the Hawaii industry.
6. Organized and executed over 30 targeted special public workshops and other presentations on a variety of topics, e.g., computerized accounting, Hawaiian fishponds, use of robotics, fish breeding, low cost technology, getting started in aquaculture, and general overview of Hawaii aquaculture.

In conclusion, I urge UH Sea Grant and National Sea Grant to continue its strong support of aquaculture extension and maintain the partnership with ADP. Rest assured ADP will do everything possible, to maintain and increase its financial contribution to the project. Clearly, these services are essential for continued industry growth and we need to collaborate to find ways to bring more resources to bare on the growing extension needs of the industry.

Please let us know if we can provide any additional commentary on the value of the SG/ADP Aquaculture Extension Program. We would be happy to do so and bring in the industry to further describe the many benefits being derived.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John S. Corbin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "C".

John S. Corbin
Manager

c: Leonard Young
Clyde Tamaru
Bob Howerton
Jim Szyper
Ron Weidenbach, HAA