



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented before the
Senate Committee on Water, Land, Agriculture, and Hawaiian Affairs
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by
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HB 404, HD2, Relating to Agriculture

Chair Kokubun, Vice Chair Tokuda, and Members of the Committee:

The purpose of HB 404, HD2 is to appropriate funds for a grant for the Hawai'i Farm Bureau Federation (HFBF) to conduct agricultural research and development.

The University supports HB 404, HD2.

Agricultural research is essential to the success of diversified agriculture in Hawai'i. The knowledge gained through research efforts helps producers boost their yields through informed choices about which crops and varieties to plant, when and where to plant them, how to protect them from pests, and how to optimize postharvest quality. Agricultural research helps increase local food production, improving our state's food security, and also helps Hawai'i's producers compete in both local and export markets.

The Farm Bureau is an important voice for farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural producers. HFBF works closely with CTAHR and other agricultural research institutions, including the Hawai'i Agriculture Research Center, the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Pacific Basin Agricultural Research Center. Together, these organizations and agencies cooperate on research projects to improve the production of Hawai'i crops. We complement each other's efforts, minimizing overlap and assuring the broadest range of research assistance to the agricultural community. The funds appropriated by HB 404, HD2 will be managed by the HFBF to facilitate research that will support the continued expansion of diversified agriculture and help create new local, national, and international marketing opportunities for our agricultural goods.

A good example of this collaborative approach to agricultural research is the ongoing evaluation of blueberries as a potential niche crop for Hawai'i. Blueberries are growing in popularity as consumers learn about the health benefits of the antioxidants they contain. Blueberries command a premium price in Hawai'i, retailing for as much as \$20.00 per pound, so replacing imported blueberries with locally grown promises a good

return for Hawai'i farmers who have land at suitably high elevation and cool temperature. In addition, Hawai'i's year-round growing season could allow us to export blueberries at times when supply is limited on the mainland. Following the success of initial small-scale studies by CTAHR and the USDA, HFBF is helping fund the planting of two research plots totaling about 1,000 plants to evaluate the yield and market potential of various blueberry cultivars. This type of research enables the continued growth of diversified agriculture here in Hawai'i.

With the exceptions of sugarcane and corn, Hawai'i's crops are considered to be "minor specialty crops" that often fare poorly in national competitive grant programs designed to promote research on problems faced by the producers of mainland commodity crops. Expanding the state grant made to HFBF to \$2 million will increase the availability of funds for which CTAHR researchers can compete and will partially compensate for the damage caused to Hawai'i's agricultural research programs by the loss of federal earmarks in fiscal year 2006–2007.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.