



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the

COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER PROTECTION & COMMERCE

Rep. Robert N. Herkes, Chair

Rep. Angus L.K. McKelvey, Vice Chair

DATE: Wednesday, February 21, 2007

TIME: 2:00 pm

PLACE: Conference Room 325
State Capitol

By James Gaines
Interim Vice President for Research
University of Hawaii

RE: Testimony In Opposition of HB1577HD1

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide **testimony in opposition to HB1577HD1** which prohibits the growing of genetically modified coffee in Hawaii.

The University of Hawaii, through its College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR), works with farmers involved in a variety of farming techniques from conventional to organic to genetically modified cropping. The university's history of supporting agriculture and farming in Hawaii goes back to the beginning of the last century and its contributions to those activities are well documented. As the primary research organization of the State of Hawaii, the university is sensitive to legislation that may impede its research and educational mission especially when such legislation is based on concerns surrounding the protection of a particular market position instead of the merits or risks of the prohibited research.

The university believes that restrictions such as those in HB1577 put all research being conducted in the state, both by the university and private companies, at risk. Without the opportunity to move research into the marketplace, the economic incentive to produce a product disappears and the ability to attract research dollars is diminished.

The proposed ban of growing of genetically modified coffee in the State of Hawaii while still allowing research would significantly reduce the continuum of research in this area and force some research faculty to move in to other areas of inquiry. This redirection of research effort could prove detrimental to the entire industry by subjugating the creation of knowledge that may be needed to respond to a threat caused by new diseases, invasive species or other crop threatening scenarios. In not providing any direction in what areas of research would be allowed, HB1577 artificially protects existing markets from competition created by new coffee varieties and innovative practices and would place an extreme burden on farmers who choose, for one reason or another, to adopt new technologies at their farms.

Development of a new plant variety may take five to seven years to perfect. Most of this work is conducted in laboratories and green houses precisely so that any adverse effects or undesirable characteristics are examined and evaluated before field trials begin. In addition, there is an extensive permitting process under the US Department of Agriculture with oversight by the Hawaii Department of Agriculture that must be undertaken before any engineered plant is allowed to be tested in the field.

Most importantly, we find this bill to be overly restrictive and anathema to the knowledge-based economy that so many people in our state are trying to develop. Instead of empowering our people to create new knowledge and ideas through research and innovation, HB1577 impedes the progress of science and places artificial constraints on the ingenuity and creativity of our people. A research restriction does little to protect coffee, but it may significantly impact our ability to move forward and discover new farming methods and coffee varieties that may be of value to our state in the future.

Mahalo for your consideration,