



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Agriculture

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By

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HB 1615 Relating to Development of a Shellfish Aquaculture Industry

Chair Tsuji and Committee Members:

My name is Maria Haws (Ph.D.) and I am a Sea Grant Extension Specialist and Director of the Pearl Research and Training Program at the University of Hawai'i Hilo. Dr. Robert Howerton, also a Sea Grant Aquaculture Specialist in Maui County, and I would like to offer testimony in support of the intent of HB1615, which appropriates \$75,000 to conduct a feasibility and cost study to develop a shellfish aquaculture industry for Hawai'i, provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities expressed in our Board of Regents approved Biennium Budget request.

We have conducted research into the issue of shellfish industry development in Hawai'i and our findings indicate that a vibrant shellfish industry could be developed in Hawai'i if a few obstacles could be addressed. Aquaculture is one of the fastest growing segments of diversified agriculture in the State, reaching \$28.4M in wholesale product value in 2005. Hawai'i has an opportunity to expand and diversify its aquaculture industry by encouraging culture of shellfish (clams and oysters) on land and in selected ocean waters around the State. The US production of clams and oysters (for food) exceeds \$170M (2005 U.S.D.A.).

Current State Department of Health regulations allows imports of live shellfish for food, but not for the culture of shellfish for local consumption and export. This presents a missed opportunity for local shellfish growers, who are already growing clams and oysters for seed export sales, but are not permitted to grow clams and oysters for food.

Although Hawai'i has some of the cleanest coastal waters in the country, our State regulations are the most restrictive. Federal regulations require certain procedures and testing to be able to sell cultured oysters and clams locally and for export, and Hawai'i currently does not have the required laboratory certification.

If some of the easily-resolved impediments could be addressed as proposed in HB1615, we could see the existence of a profitable shellfish industry in Hawai'i soon. This would also support the existing bivalve seed industry in Hawai'i which now exports millions of dollars worth of seed each year, but cannot grow them out nor harvest them here in Hawai'i. Additionally, the

traditional Hawaiian fish ponds offer one of the best types of sites for shellfish production, and allowing shellfish culture would directly benefit operators of these ponds.

We strongly endorse the intent of HB 1615 which would provide support to overcome the few remaining obstacles to establishing another form of aquaculture in the State to provide income, jobs and locally-produced seafood.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.