



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Hawaiian Affairs
Senate Committee on Education
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by
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HB 3309 HD1 RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chair Tokuda, Chair Sakamoto, and Members of the Committees:

The University of Hawai'i supports House Bill 3309, HD1, which makes an appropriation to the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) to move the Agribusiness Incubator Program and Poamoho Research Station projects and personnel to a site in Kunia.

Today we have a unique opportunity to support diversified agriculture on O'ahu. A land owner is willing to contribute to the Hawaii Agriculture Research Center (HARC) approximately 119 acres of land adjacent to Kunia Road plus worker housing and office facilities. HARC, the Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation, the Agricultural Leadership Foundation of Hawaii, and the Landscape Industry Council of Hawaii are interested in co-locating their operations at this site to share business-related resources and develop synergies and economies of scale. CTAHR is also interested in locating some of its programs at this site, including the Agribusiness Incubator Program currently housed at the Mānoa campus, the Poamoho Research Station, and some extension services. Large and small agribusinesses have also expressed interest in establishing long-term leases and locating and expanding their businesses at this location.

In the heart of Central O'ahu's agricultural lands, we can create a remarkable synergy by bringing together large and small agricultural businesses, public and private non-profit research programs, organizations that advocate for the agricultural community, and a business incubator dedicated to helping agribusiness ventures of all sizes establish and expand. Creating this agricultural business complex will facilitate close, sustained collaboration between researchers and outreach providers and the stakeholders they serve. Being closer and more accessible to our clients will promote greater interaction and more effective service, and developing demonstration plantings that are easy for our clients to visit will expand opportunities for hands-on training.

Locating the Agribusiness Incubator Program at this agricultural business complex will make it easier for start-ups and established businesses to benefit from consulting and product development services they might not otherwise be able to access. The National Business Incubator Association reports that 87 percent of enterprises developed in an incubator environment survive their first five years, compared with only 25 percent of those developed without the benefits of incubation.

The current site of the Poamoho Research Station is less suitable than the proposed new site for agricultural research activities. The disadvantages of the current site include vulnerability to fire and agricultural theft, each of which can destroy years of research in a few minutes. Much of the station's acreage was burned by brushfires in fall 2007, and the highway that bisects the station makes it easier for thieves to gain access. Irrigation costs at the current site are also high.

CTAHR researchers and extension faculty, their colleagues at HARC, and their cooperators in industry all stand to gain from co-locating. The resulting agricultural advances and the development of new entrepreneurial businesses will also help our economy and environment. As our state's most populous island, O'ahu faces considerable demographic pressure to build housing on usable, undeveloped land. High land values coupled with the decline of the sugarcane and pineapple industries have put many thousands of acres of O'ahu's important agricultural lands at risk. Keeping these lands in farming will encourage the continued growth of a diverse agriculture in Hawaii. By producing food near our state's largest market for agricultural products and minimizing the fuel needed to transport that food to consumers, Hawai'i agriculture—and O'ahu agriculture in particular—contributes to greater food security and sustainability. The development of bioenergy resources holds promise for decreasing our reliance on costly imported petroleum and lessening our greenhouse gas emissions. I believe that the scientific and commercial opportunities made possible by HB 3309, HD1 will benefit not only O'ahu but all of Hawai'i.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.