



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Agriculture
and the
House Committee on Public Safety & Military Affairs
March 20, 2008 at 10:40 am
by
Dr. William Mokahi Steiner, Dean
College of Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resource Management
University of Hawai'i at Hilo

HCR 260/HR221 REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, FORESTRY, AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII`I AT HILO AND HAWAII`I COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO CONDUCT A STUDY ON THE PROGRAMS DEVELOPED BY THE KULANI CORRECTIONAL FACILITY THAT WOULD AID IN THE REVITALIZATION OF STATE AGRICULTURE

Chair Tsuji, Chair Evans and Members of the Committees:

I am writing as Dean of the College of Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resource Management (CAFNRM) at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo in support of HCR 260. We are a College devoting our attention toward hands-on agriculture for the State of Hawai'i, and toward building a sustainable future and food and fuel security for our islands.

I am concerned about the return rate of graduating inmates and their inability to cope in today's modern society. We must do something to give these inmates a better chance to make it outside of prison walls and one way to do that is through education. As a professional university administrator in Agricultural Sciences, I am concerned about building a future for our islands and the current worsening economic situation that puts Hawai'i further and further behind in its goals to reach sustainability quickly, for we shall have to be quick about it given the 100% increase of major grain crops like wheat which is imported, and near tripling of fuel expenses, which supports all our activities in the state, over the last two years. We have already seen the collapse of our poultry and dairy industries in the state because of the increasing costs in these two commodities alone.

But we have a problem with respect to reaching any sustainable agricultural future, and that is a lack of trained manpower to carry out any agricultural development. Yet a pool of potential talent does await education here, and that pool is precisely what is addressed in HCR 260, our inmates who have reached a stage where they may be soon released back into society at large. For these inmates, it is important that they learn a trade or skill that will enable them to find jobs and survive in a rapidly changing society struggling with transforming itself into one not so dependent on outside resources. Indeed, the training we might offer is precisely the training that the society itself will need to move quickly and with certainty into an uncertain future. It is a training which, if done right, can re-assert confidence and a feeling of worth in a population that has spent too much time wondering about their value and not having a goal to reach for or a society that respects them.

The CAFNRM is ready and willing to help undertake aspects of this training. The agricultural sciences we offer can be done in modules that would provide skills to inmates that would prove invaluable in building a core of workers ready to aid society to reach toward food and fuel independence and security. We would suggest the following 3-month learning modules:

1. A ranching module aimed at providing skills in managing tropical grass fed cattle, dairy and goats. At the recent Missouri Dairy Summit held in Springfield, Missouri which I attended, research into crossbred Jersey and Bos (tropical) cows has demonstrated that milk production is possible on grass without grain input. Grain costs are precisely what caused our own dairy industry to collapse. We need research into what tropical grasses would provide best forage, and what hybrid cross cattle and breed of goats would provide the best milk, milk fat (for cheese) and beef production on those grasses. We propose that inmates can aid us find the answer to these questions and in the process, learn how to care for and manage these animals. The results of this work would not only be information for those wanting to start small dairies, but also a skilled set of semi-professionals ready made to begin hands on production and perhaps even their own businesses.
2. A 3-month piggery module intended to develop herds for experimental production systems and increase chances for survival of this meat industry which is also declining in Hawaii. Again, the high cost of corn and grain is imposing a burden on Hawaii farmers. Yet swine are a grazing animal as well and there is no reason why we can not develop rotation systems on grass with supplementation of certain fat-rich oil crops that might serve to finish these animals for market. Again, with training and guidance, inmates close to release can not only learn who to rear and care for these special meat animals, but can participate in research to find the best breed combinations and grasses and oil crop supplements that strengthen local production without recourse to using imported finishing grains. The result is the same; we gain new information while simultaneously building a skilled workforce that understands what is needed to make these combinations work for society.

3. A silviculture module that would embrace biofuel, production and native forests. This research and education component will go far to address sustainability in two other aspects of our needs as a society; our need for energy to make our economic concerns work, and a need for a re-connection to the natural which is spiritual at its base. This 3 month module would teach the term inmate how to grow, supplement, extract, use, appreciate and care for the trees under his command. The inmate would assist on projects determining growing conditions, climate and pest impacts, invasive species control and more and with some basic biology and botany, a new appreciation of life and how it works is sure to come about. The next decade in Hawai`i will see the development had harvest of biofuel and production timber like Eucalyptus. This workforce development project will give a handy and skilled group of workers who will find good jobs while furthering the sustainable fuel and fiber projects the State will need to attain true sustainability.

I would offer one more observation that the respective Committees may wish to consider and which would strengthen this bill. It is this single element which perhaps more than any other might help these inmates find their self worth. There should be added a cultural component that could instill in these inmates a sense of identity and connection to society. This should be a training module that could accompany each of the above simultaneously so that value and appreciation of society and its underpinnings are taught. This approach, it seems, might go far in building understanding of self and society and building self pride that might help former inmates find strength to make something of themselves, while building the independence necessary to stay away from old habits because new ones have replaced them.

These are not free programs. *The CAFNRM has no extra funds to develop or to make these programs work.* Funding to the tune of \$250,000 for each module, and \$100,000 for an accompanying cultural based module will insure success. Money will be required for extra lecturers, for oversight, for the payment system required for inmates, for new living resources (bovine, goat, swine, grass seed and tree species) and tools and equipment will be necessary. But the cost will be more than offset by reduction in recidivates and the building of a workforce that will promote food and fuel security for our islands. When funded I would envision this program being activated by a Memorandum of Agreement between the concerned parties.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 260. Please contact me at my cell phone, 808-294-0750 or my work phone, 808-974-7393 if you have any questions.