



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Agriculture
and the

House Committee on Energy & Environmental Protection
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by

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HCR 238 REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TO FULLY SUPPORT THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHELLFISH AQUACULTURE INDUSTRY AND IMPLEMENT
A STATEWIDE CLASSIFICATION PROGRAM FOR SHELLFISH GROWING AREAS

Aloha Chairs Tsuji, Coffman, Vice Chair Hashem and Members of the Committees,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. The University of Hawai`i strongly supports HCR 238 as a Statewide Classification Program for Shellfish Growing Areas is critical to the development of a sustainable shellfish industry in Hawai`i.

Farming of shellfish such as oysters, clams and scallops is one of the simplest and most environmentally sustainable forms of food production. Hawai`i is the only coastal state in the U.S. where shellfish cannot be farmed and sold. This is entirely due to the lack of full implementation of the existing State Shellfish Sanitation Plan. If shellfish farming were to become possible in Hawai`i, it would reduce our dependence on imported seafood, offer opportunities for profitable "mom and pop" shellfish farms and provide a way for traditional Hawaiian fishponds to become fully productive.

Hawai`i has had several successful shellfish farms in the past, but these went out of business over 20 years ago. Due to the lack of a fully implemented State Shellfish Sanitation Plan, no new businesses have been started since then, and our shellfish industry essentially disappeared from memory, except for two large hatcheries located at NELHA in Kailua-Kona, and another on Kaua`i. Ironically, although these hatcheries are among the largest in the U.S., none of the shellfish seed they produce can legally be grown out and sold in Hawai`i because the shellfish sanitation plan has not been fully implemented.

For the last 12 years, we have conducted research in Hawai`i to establish the biological and commercial feasibility of shellfish aquaculture in Hawai`i as interest and shellfish farming has re-emerged. We have also developed a Hawaiian species of oyster for production, which offers an unique and tasty product for Hawai`i farmers.

Our research results indicate that farming shellfish such as clams and oysters is biologically

feasible in Hawai`i, with the traditional Hawaiian fish ponds being excellent farming sites for shellfish. Oysters in particular have shown high growth rates and we have obtained market sized oysters of 2-3 inches in six months, as compared to the Mainland U.S. where this takes 2-3 years. Additionally, oysters grown in ponds and at a shrimp farm on O`ahu, Moloka`i and Hawai`i Island have excellent taste and texture.

At the same time we have been working to demonstrate the feasibility of oyster culture in Hawai`i, world events have conspired to make shellfish farming less viable in other areas of the world. Disease has seriously affected production on the East Coast, France and China, which are major shellfish growing areas. Hurricanes and the BP oil spill have affected the Gulf Coast. The NW industry is suffering from ocean acidification and limited availability of growing areas. The Japanese industry has been devastated by the recent tsunami and nuclear issues. Hence, this is a opportune moment for Hawai`i producers to compete on the U.S. and international markets by offering a clean, high quality product that bears the "produced in Hawai`i" label.

There is a high level of interest among the public and potential shellfish farmers to start new farms. The Shellfish Working Group, comprised of researchers, potential farmers, agency representatives and managers of Hawaiian fish ponds, has been in dialogue with DOH personnel for over two years in trying to fully implementing the State Shellfish Sanitation Plan so that shellfish farms can be established in Hawai`i. The DOH personnel have been highly cooperative and helpful, and we are optimistic that DOH can move forward with full implementation of the plan. Moreover, since every other coastal state in the U.S. engages in classification of shellfish growing grounds, successful models exist which DOH can readily follow. Passing HCR 238 will express support for DOH to fully achieve their legal mandate to oversee implementation of the Shellfish Sanitation Plan.

If DOH is able to move forward and begin fully implement the existing State Shellfish Sanitation Plan, Hawai`i farmers could be selling oysters locally and exporting product by the end of 2012. Given our current economic crisis, this is one way in which environmentally sustainable small business development can be achieved with minimal effort on behalf of one State Agency.

Thank you for your support.