



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Agriculture
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by
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and
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HB 1989 – RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Chair Wooley, Vice Chair Onishi, and members of the House Committee on Agriculture, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on HB 1989, which proposes to establish an on-farm mentoring program to teach and train farmers to utilize a whole system approach to agriculture.

While we agree with the intent of HB 1989 with respect to farmer training and improving soil health, this bill would charge the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR), University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, with development, implementation and management of an entirely new instructional system of private farmers acting as contractors and mentors, and appropriates funds to the University of Hawai'i solely for the purpose of providing grants of up to \$50,000 for this purpose to individual farmers or farming organizations. However, we do not believe that CTAHR is an appropriate entity to administer a program of grants to individual farmers, as required by this bill.

Administration of grants to private businesses is a more appropriate activity for state agencies such as the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture, or Department of Land and Natural Resources. As an academic unit within the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, CTAHR does not have infrastructure nor procedures in place to administer a program of grants to private individuals. Thus, we cannot support approval of this bill.

We are committed to working with farming organizations to achieve the goals of soil health, reduced input costs for farmers, and greater food self-sufficiency in Hawai'i, and we would like to encourage the Committee members to consider an alternative to establishing an entirely new state-funded system of private farming mentors. The Cooperative Extension Service directed by CTAHR has been engaged in assisting and training farmers in Hawai'i for over 100 years, and instructional programs within the University of Hawai'i System, including CTAHR, provide formal training in the skills needed to succeed in Hawaii's agricultural and food industries. Fiscal support for new and ongoing agricultural training programs, including support for temporary and permanent staff positions, would pay greater dividends than an entirely new system of private grants as proposed in HB 1989.