



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Water, Land, and Agriculture
And
Senate Committee on Higher Education and the Arts
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HB 2676 HD2 – RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Chairs Gabbard and Taniguchi, Vice Chair Nishihara, and members of the Senate Committee on Water, Land, and Agriculture and Senate Committee on Higher Education and the Arts, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB 2676 HD2, which appropriates funds to the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR), Agribusiness Incubator Program for the establishment of a five-year energy independent farming community pilot project.

We support this measure provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in the University's Board of Regents Approved Executive Budget.

Beginning farmers in Hawai'i face substantial difficulties in obtaining affordable land to farm that is accessible and has adequate infrastructure. Additionally, most new farmers must live in one location, and commute to their agricultural land. The lease or mortgage costs associated with maintaining two pieces of property (residence and farm), the costs of commuting, and high risk of agricultural vandalism and theft at unattended farm lots, make this a very difficult, if not impossible, situation for the future generation of farmers. The resulting decline in those entering farming and succeeding at it threatens the food security of Hawai'i.

HB 2676 HD2 proposes to investigate and implement a novel solution to this dilemma by establishing sustainable, energy-independent farming communities on state land. These communities would share central facilities, with homes located adjacent to each tenant's farm. Modern technologies make such essentially off-the-grid communities with alternative energy sources, water reuse, and small, low-cost housing units a viable proposition.

The Agribusiness Incubator Program (AIP) has contributed to the business success of many small farmers and food producers in Hawai'i. Planning of such a farming community pilot project, including identification of economic and regulatory obstacles

and possible solutions, is within the program's area of expertise. First year costs for planning and business plan development would be \$150,000 for AIP personnel and operational support. Since it is beyond the scope of CTAHR and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa to issue bonds, obtain land, build community infrastructure, and actively manage community affairs, subsequent years will require that other state agencies become involved as partners to address the business infrastructure and land stewardship needs of the pilot project.

The decline in new farmers is a serious issue for Hawai'i that demands novel approaches. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2676 HD2.