



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I SYSTEM

TESTIMONY

S.B. #2408, S.D. 1
Relating to Tropical Agriculture and Community Resources

Testimony Presented before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

March 2, 2004

By

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Dean, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources
University of Hawai'i

Testimony for
Senate Bill 2408, S.D. 1

RELATING TO TROPICAL AGRICULTURE AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

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I am pleased to contribute the expertise of the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) to the decision-making process on Senate Bill 2408, S.D. 1, Relating to Tropical Agriculture and Community Resources. SB2408, SD1 appropriates funds to the University of Hawai'i for research, instruction, and outreach in the areas of tropical agriculture and community resource development.

I am testifying today in support of the intent of SB2408, SD1, which adds funds to the UH base budget for the purpose of maintaining and expanding CTAHR programs in four areas: (1) development of agricultural products, breeding programs, biotechnology, and sustainable resource management practices; (2) tropical forage and beef improvement; (3) healthy food and nutrition; and (4) the Data Center on Children and Families. This appropriation would restore CTAHR's budget to 97% of 1995 levels. In addition, a 2004–2005 appropriation of \$500,000 is requested to fund research and testing of biological treatment approaches for cleaning contaminated environments (“bioremediation”). The programs outlined in SB2408, SD1 reflect CTAHR's commitment to helping the state diversify its economy, strengthen its communities, and ensure a sustainable environment.

The most immediate concern addressed by SB2408, SD1 is the addition of \$500,000 in faculty funding to UH's base budget. The research, instruction, and outreach activities of CTAHR's faculty play a vital role in supporting Hawai'i agriculture and its value-added products, which contribute \$2.4 billion to the state's economy and employ more than 38,000 people. During the 1990s, CTAHR's general funds budget was reduced by \$5 million, resulting in the loss of 36 faculty positions. This hampered the College's efforts to assist members of Hawai'i's agricultural community, introduce new products to the Hawai'i market, promote Hawai'i products here and abroad, create innovative and valuable technologies, and investigate sustainable approaches to managing natural resources. The Legislature responded by passing Act 234, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2001, which provided \$500,000 in funding for each year of the 2001–2003 biennium. CTAHR used the Act 234 funds to fill nine new faculty positions: extension agents on Hawai'i and Maui and

biotechnologists and professors at the Mānoa campus. Although Act 234, SLH 2001 contained language to add \$500,000 appropriation to the UH base budget, budgetary restrictions prevented the University from rolling these funds into the 2003–2005 budget. By adding \$500,000 to UH's base budget, SB2408, SD1 enables CTAHR to retain the faculty hired with Act 234 funds. State investment in these faculty members will pay dividends for the stakeholders and communities they serve, the students they teach, and the businesses supported by the extramural grants they bring to Hawai'i.

In addition to faculty support, SB2408, SD1 funds several key CTAHR projects. Among these is a tropical beef and forage initiative to revitalize Hawai'i's beef cattle industry, which has declined 37% in value during the past 20 years. Through education efforts to raise the market profile of Hawai'i beef and research to improve forages and herd genetics, CTAHR is working to promote a promising high-value commodity, "natural" beef finished locally on forage or feed. If 50,000 of the beef calves currently exported by the state were finished here rather than on the mainland U.S. or in Canada, the value of Hawai'i's beef industry could increase by as much as \$25 million.

SB2408, SD1 provides base budget funds for CTAHR's human nutrition research and outreach efforts to lessen the harm caused by obesity, a health problem that is associated with deadly ailments—heart disease, cancer, stroke, hypertension, and diabetes—and is particularly common among Native Hawaiians and Pacific islanders. The College proposes to expand its obesity prevention and weight management activities using a culturally sensitive, community-based approach that focuses on the benefits of eating healthy food grown locally. Studies on the nutritive and culinary properties of Pacific region plants and foods will be coupled with community gardening to create venues for physical activity, cultural experience, and enhanced food security through increased local production of safe, healthy food.

SB2408, SD1's appropriation to the Data Center on Children and Families will provide this world-class information resource with a stable base of core funding. The Data Center serves the needs of public officials and staff, university faculty and students, foundations and grant-making organizations, and the drug prevention community, among others, by gathering, analyzing, and presenting in user-friendly, Web-based formats data from national and state governments, private agencies, and philanthropic institutions. Base budget funding will ensure the Data Center's continued availability and allow it to provide additional indicator data on the health and well-being of Hawai'i's children, families, and elderly that will help policymakers, service providers, and community activists build their strategies and proposals on best practices supported by research findings.

The one-year request that SB2408, SD1 makes to fund bioremediation research and testing can help clean the contaminated sediments found in Hawai'i's waterways. Shipment of dredged sediments to the mainland for disposal is expensive, and ocean dumping can degrade our food supply and coastal resources. Bioremediation—the use of natural plant and microbial processes to immobilize, remove, or break down environmental contaminants—can be a cost-effective method for treating both dredged and undisturbed sediments. College researchers are collaborating with the Naval Research Laboratory in an ongoing sediment bioremediation project, and the Army Corps of Engineers has expressed interest in providing

technical assistance for the treatability studies and field testing proposed in SB2408, SD1. CTAHR will pursue matching funds from these institutions to complement the SB2408, SD1 appropriation. We will also work cooperatively with the School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology and the Colleges of Natural Sciences and Engineering to fully utilize the bioremediation expertise available at UH-M noa.

We support SB2408, SD1 provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our Executive Biennium Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.