UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I SYSTEM

TESTIMONY

S.C.R.#213/S.R.#121

REQUESTING COORDINATION BY STATE AND COUNTY REGULATORY AGENCIES WITH RESPECT TO THE MANAGEMENT OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS (GMO) RELATING TO HEALTH, AGRICULTURE, AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

Testimony Presented Before the

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER, LAND, AND AGRICULTURE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

April 1, 2005

By

Andrew G. Hashimoto
Dean, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources
University of Hawai‘i

Testimony for
Senate Concurrent Resolution 213/Senate Resolution 121

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Senate Committee on Water, Land, and Agriculture
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The Twenty-third Legislature
State of Hawai‘i
April 1, 2005

by

Dr. Andrew G. Hashimoto, Dean
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human 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 Concurrent Resolution 213 and Senate Resolution 121, which request coordination by state and county regulatory agencies with respect to the management of genetically modified organisms (GMO) relating to health, agriculture, and the environment.

We oppose SCR213 and SR121. We believe that these resolutions are based on flawed assumptions. Advances in biotechnology are not outpacing safety studies. Genetically engineered crops undergo safety evaluation by multiple agencies of the federal government. During the development of a GE crop, USDA regulates its interstate movement and field testing. For a GE crop to be deregulated, USDA must find that its release will not adversely affect non-target (i.e., non-pest) organisms or the environment. For GE crops that produce biological pesticides, EPA establishes the level of pesticide that is safe for the environment and for human consumption. If the GE crop is to be consumed by people or animals, FDA participates in the regulatory process, determining whether the GE crop is substantially equivalent to conventional varieties of the same crop in terms of nutritional value and toxicity.

The “precautionary principle” cited in the resolutions, which assumes products are unwholesome until proved otherwise, is not an appropriate regulatory standard. We do not apply this standard to the many familiar, conventionally bred foods that are known to contain toxins or allergens. The resolutions seek to apply this standard to GM crops that are extensively tested, but not to conventional crops that are tested much less rigorously if at all. This approach will limit the access of Hawai‘i growers and consumers to the benefits of GM crops. For example, in commercial papaya production on the Big Island,

the growing of GM papaya resistant to the papaya ringspot virus lowers the levels of ringspot virus in the environment, protecting non-GM papaya from the virus. If we assume that GM papaya are unwholesome despite years of safety testing and in the absence of any identifiable risks, growers and consumers of both GM and conventional papaya will be harmed.

There is no conclusive scientific evidence to indicate that the process of genetic engineering creates any greater risks for consumers or the environment than does the process of conventional breeding. By the time a genetically engineered organism is deregulated and made available for sale in the U.S., it has already been found by one or more federal agencies to pose no greater risk than conventionally bred organisms. The additional levels of state and local regulation that these resolutions would add to federal regulations are unnecessary, redundant, and fiscally inappropriate given the limited availability of state and local funds and the absence of quantifiable risks related to current regulatory practices.

For these reasons, we oppose SCR213 and SR121.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.