



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Agriculture  
March 19, 2008 at 9:00 a.m.

by  
James R. Gaines  
Vice President for Research, University of Hawai'i System

SB 958 SD1 HD1  
RELATING TO GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Aloha Chair Tsuji, Vice Chair Brower, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide **testimony in opposition to SB958 SD1 HD1** which provides a 10-year moratorium specifically so that no genetically modified taro shall be developed, tested, propagated, cultivated, raised, or grown in the State.

The University of Hawaii's history of supporting agriculture and farming in Hawaii goes back to the beginning of the last century and its contributions to those activities are well documented. As the primary research organization of the State of Hawaii and a nationally and globally respected research institution, the University is sensitive to legislation that may impede its research and educational mission especially when such legislation is based on misinformation promulgated by individuals and organizations whose primary motivation is not the well-being of taro in Hawaii, but opposition to genetic engineering.

Please make no mistake; The University is very sensitive to the spiritual and cultural significance of taro in Hawaii. By abandoning its patents on disease resistant, traditionally cross-bred, hybrid taro and entering into an agreement to consult with the Hawaiian community before conducting any research on genetically engineered Hawaiian taro, the University exhibited its respect for the cultural significance of Hawaiian taro.

Since the last legislative session there has been much discussion between the University and taro farmers. We believe significant progress has been made in understanding the problems they face on the ground and in their loi. Moreover, the University is strongly in support of SB2915 SD2 to create a Taro Security and Purity Task Force. We strongly believe that the issues surrounding the long-term health and purity of Hawaiian taro will be insured with dialogue and focused research. We also believe that a moratorium may end taro research in Hawaii and that should a pest or disease afflict taro in new and unforeseen ways, the University would be unable to respond in a timely manner.

As such, we ask your committee to ask the following questions:

In 10 years will taro be any less revered by the Hawaiian community than it is today?  
No.

In 10 years will taro be at any less risk from disease, pests and invasive species? No.

In 10 years will the University be conducting genetic engineering on Hawaiian taro without consultation from the Hawaiian community? No.

In 10 years will the University and taro farmers be working together to solve problems and provide the proper care for our revered taro? Maybe.

A moratorium will not change the answer to any of the questions above, however to insure that the last question is answered 'yes', we ask that the legislature focus its energy on bringing parties together and properly funding the taro task force proposed under SB2915 SD2 so that we can positively address the problems facing taro. If in the future, the taro task force recommends a similar moratorium to the legislature, the University would have a better appreciation of the need.

Mahalo for your consideration.