



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## Legislative Testimony

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Testimony Presented Before the  
Senate Energy and Environment Committee and  
Water, Land, Agriculture, and Hawaiian Affairs Committee  
February 10, 2009 at 3:30pm  
by  
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### SB 237 – RELATING TO GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FISH

The University of Hawaii stands in opposition to SB 237.

The first genetically engineered (GE) fish were produced almost 25 years ago and since that time over 35 species have been genetically engineered. As of 2005 no GE fish has been approved for food production in the United States. The greatest science-based concerns associated with GE fish are those related to the ecological consequences of their inadvertent release or escape, not the quality or safety of the product.

As the bill correctly states, in September 2008, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued draft guidelines for the regulation of GE animals. These guidelines are to insure that both the food safety and environmental risks are properly tested and evaluated. To date only one application for approval of a GE fish for human consumption is under evaluation. The University of Hawaii (UH) believes it would be premature to legislate labeling requirements when not even one evaluation of a GE fish has been completed by our federal agencies.

Currently, there is no evidence to suggest that foods produced from GE animals would provide any greater hazards than the consumption of conventionally or organically raised animals. In fact, the FDA has already determined that cloned animals are safe to eat. As with GE plants, the FDA concluded in 1992 that there is “no basis for concluding that GE foods differ from other foods in any meaningful or uniform way, or that, as a class, foods developed by the new techniques present any different or greater safety concern than foods developed by traditional plant breeding.”

To label foods based on the process that was used to grow them would only add to consumer confusion and in the end, will provide little information that would assist consumers in making an informed decision on the healthful qualities and/or risk of using the product. UH believes that if any labeling legislation is enacted, it should be fact-based and focused on providing information to consumers on what is actually in the food they are choosing.

The UH strongly believes that any legislation should use an accurate and scientifically accepted definition of terms. The definitions of “genetically engineered fish” and “genetically engineered fish product” as provided in this bill are, at best, confusing. . We offer a scientifically accurate definition of genetic engineering may help clarify the term:

The development and application of scientific methods, procedures, and technologies that permit direct manipulation of genetic material in order to alter the hereditary traits of a cell, organism, or population.

UH supports providing relevant, fact-based information to consumers so that they can make informed choices on what to buy and feed to their families. However the UH cannot support this fish labeling bill. As written, this bill will only add to consumer confusion and assist in perpetuating misinformation that foods produced by one method or another are somehow safer than others when in fact, there is no data to support such presumptions. UH respectfully requests that this bill be deferred.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.