



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Energy and Environment Committee and
Water, Land, Agriculture, and Hawaiian Affairs Committee
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by
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SB 238 – RELATING TO LABELING OF GENETICALLY ENGINEERED CROPS

The University of Hawaii stands in opposition to SB 238.

In the decades since genetically engineered (GE) crops have been introduced into the food supply, there have been no studies that indicate any greater hazards associated with the consumption of GE foods compared to conventionally or organically grown varieties. In fact, over the years as more research has been conducted, more jurisdictions in more countries have approved more crop varieties for human use and consumption. 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.

The University of Hawaii (UH) believes that if any labeling legislation is enacted, it should be focused on providing information to consumers on what is actually in the food they are choosing. For example, conventional, organic and GE farms all use a variety of chemicals to fertilize their crops and to control weeds and pests. Many of these chemicals, even some approved for organic farming, can be quite toxic. In the United States there are numerous data and research that directly tie the use of agri-chemicals to serious injuries and deaths EVERY YEAR.

Recently Dr Pam Ronald, a plant geneticist, and Raoul Adamchack, an organic farmer, from the University of California, Davis gave a series of talks across Hawaii about their book "Tomorrow's Table, Organic Farming, Genetic Engineering and the Future of Food". The following paragraph from p.98 illustrates this point:

If we carry forward with labeling a product, then organic produce treated with rotenone, a "natural" pesticide favored by some organic farmers, would need to be labeled with the following, "may contain trace amounts of rotenone. Chronic exposure can cause damage to liver or kidney" (OSHA 1998). Organic super sweet corn would require this label: "Carries a genetic mutation induced by radiation mutagenesis, resulting in the presence of a mutant protein." Organically grown papaya would need to be marked: "may contain vast amounts of papaya ringspot viral DNA and protein".

These labels are so ominous that it is not likely that many people would feel comfortable eating these organic fruits and vegetables. Still, there is no evidence that any of these food products are hazardous.

The UH strongly believes that any legislation should use an accurate and scientifically accepted definition of terms. The definitions of “genetically engineered crop” and “genetically engineered whole food” 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 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.