



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
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by

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SB 380 SD1 – RELATING HIGHER EDUCATION

Chair Ige, Vice Chair Kidani, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Bruce Mathews and I am Interim Dean and Professor of Soil Science & Agronomy in the College of Agriculture, Forestry, and Natural Resource Management (CAFNRM) at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. CAFNRM strongly supports SB380 SD1 to pursue a Higher Education Learning Center Project in the District of Puna, Hawai'i. SB380 SD1 will assist in identifying educational training needs and resources in Puna and strongly contribute to the rural region's economic revitalization efforts. The desired outcomes will be accomplished through sustainable agricultural production and value-added product development outreach for local markets coupled with a business incubator approach. This effort should also lead to increased enrollment in the agricultural programs offered by the University of Hawai'i System, more entrepreneurial farmers, improved cooperation among agricultural organizations, and a new generation of innovative and responsible agricultural leaders.

We appreciate the support of the legislature to strengthen rural outreach, economic development, and agricultural education while facilitating progress toward enhanced food security for Hawai'i. There is a critical need to strengthen the outreach capacity of CAFNRM as there is heavy demand relative to existing teaching faculty resources and their present duties. This rural learning center project could serve as an eventual model for other regions of Hawai'i facing similar challenges.

We envision the hiring of two outreach personnel to work as a team. One should have expertise in farm and agribusiness planning and management and the other complimentary position should emphasize expertise in sustainable crop production. Both would be expected to provide small-farm sustainable agriculture "boots on the ground" outreach services and short training courses on farm management, sustainable crop production, value-added food products, etc. Furthermore, the outreach personnel would be expected to survey Puna community educational and training needs for agricultural sector development and increase community engagement and participation in agriculture through various outreach forums (including an active website and blog).

We support this bill provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.