UNIVERSITY OF HAWAIʻI SYSTEM
Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Higher Education and the Arts
and
Senate Committee on Water, Land, and Agriculture
Tuesday, February 16, 2016 at 1:15 p.m.
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And
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SB 2141 – RELATING TO THE SUSTAINABLE AND ORGANIC AGRICULTURE PROGRAM

Chairs Taniguchi and Gabbard, Vice Chair Nishihara, and members of the committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 2141, which appropriates funds for three positions in the sustainable and organic agriculture program administered by the UH College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) and statewide expansion of the program.

We support this measure provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in the University's Board of Regents Approved Executive Budget.

The Sustainable and Organic Agriculture Program (SOAP) at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) is committed to increasing awareness and adoption of sustainable and organic agriculture practices across the State of Hawaiʻi. Two CTAHR faculty members serve as statewide co-coordinators, and 18 faculty serve as topic leaders in the program. The advisory board of SOAP includes eight members from Hawaiʻi's diversified agriculture industry representing five different islands and different agricultural commodity groups. The program conducts research in organic agriculture, produces informational materials and websites, makes organic seeds available through the CTAHR Agricultural Diagnostic Service Center, and conducts year-round training, workshops, field days and farm tours. SOAP educational programs have reached over 25,000 agricultural professionals and members of the public.

Through statewide collaborations, SOAP has worked to increase adoption and acreage of Hawaii's organic fruit and vegetable operations. These industries are now valued over $12.1 million, compared to $7.6 million in 2008 (a 59% increase).

As with other faculty-led programs at the University of Hawai‘i, support staff and operations are funded through extramural grants and contracts. Grant cycles, and the ability to obtain sufficient extramural funding at a given time threatens program continuity, and imposes restrictions on program growth, despite steadily increasing demand for SOAP services from local stakeholders. Recent changes in agricultural production on Maui are expected to greatly increase such demand in the FY 2017 fiscal year. SB 2141 would provide the amount of $250,000 to fund three assistants for the SOAP program and provide modest support for operations, in order to insure program continuity and ability to serve an increasing clientele base at this critical time.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 2141.