



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Agriculture
Wednesday, February 17, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

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HB 8 – RELATING TO FOOD SECURITY

Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Perruso, and members of the House Committee on Agriculture:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of the intent of HB 8.

Food security is a critical need for our island state. By food security, we understand it to mean a sustainable mix of locally produced and imported food that provides sufficient quantities of affordable, safe and healthy food to the citizens of Hawai'i. We do not include it to mean food for the purpose of tourism (although that is also important and goes to the need for increased food production).

An integral implied part of this definition is the need for food security during disasters such as a pandemic, hurricane, and volcanic activity. Food security includes not only the production of healthy safe food, but also the food chain that makes possible that production and subsequent post-harvest processing and distribution.

The 2017 Agricultural Census by the National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) clearly lays out the challenge facing Hawai'i:

1. Just 1.2% of Hawai'i farms produced over 63% of all agricultural sales. Since these are farms that represent over \$1M in sales, it shows that commercial agriculture is a business of scale.
2. 87% of Hawai'i farms, which had less than \$50K in sales produced less than 10% of all agricultural sales.
3. Since we are concerned with food sales to local markets, 96% of local sales came from just 14% of all farms – farms that had over \$50K in total sales. Therefore 86% of farms produced only 4% of local sales.
4. Assuming that Hawai'i farms produce just 10% of the food sales in the state (as stated in the bill), the vast majority of Hawai'i farms (87%) produced less than 1% of the total food sales in the state.
5. The pandemic made the situation worse.

The clear and present need for an integrated plan around food security is needed. It should also be noted that, given the geographical nature of the state, that plan should also be island specific as well as state-wide. It should be a plan that recognizes the need for commercial farms of significant size as measured by local sales and other metrics to be determined; as mentioned in the bill.

Such a plan should be based on the input from a diverse array of experts from state, county, university, and commercial farmer experiences. The bill as outlined includes the opportunity for input. We recommend that the data collection be accomplished by providing funding to NASS because of their long experience and network of doing such work. It would also make the data produced for Hawai'i comparable with that collected for other states.

Speaking for the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, given our expertise in food science, dietetics, animal science, horticulture, general agriculture and agricultural economics, we would welcome the opportunity to join the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) in this discussion and in the overall development of such a plan.

We also recognize the difficult economic situation that the state in general, and the HDOA specifically, face in the next budget year. While we testify in strong support of the intent of this bill, we defer to HDOA as to their priorities due to personnel and budgetary limitations.