



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
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SB 128 – RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Nishihara and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and the Environment:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of SB 128 relating to agriculture and the use of pesticides to address the Coffee Leaf Rust (CLR) issue.

According to the 2018 State Agriculture overview published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Hawai'i produced 5.4 million pounds (green weight) of coffee grown on 7,100 harvested acres, with an average yield of 1.92 tons/acre, at a unit price of \$19.40/lb., for a value of \$50.16 million. These data show the high value of this crop to Hawai'i agriculture since that value is based on using just 0.65% of farm acres operated. There is no doubt that the economic challenges brought on by the pandemic has forced a significant negative impact on the coffee industry.

We can now add another challenge--CLR. As outlined in SB 128, CLR can be a devastating disease if it becomes established in a coffee orchard. The spores of the fungal disease are spread by the wind giving it a high potential to spread once established. Complicating CLR control is that there are coffee trees that escaped from orchards and are growing wild in the landscape. These trees, which are not under any level of supervision can be sources of the spores.

The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) Cooperative Extension Service is a partner with other state and federal agencies in addressing the coffee industry's response to CLR. The controls range from sanitation of orchards to the use of fungicides. The College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resource (CTAHR) runs the Interregional Research Project No. 4 (IR-4) program that acquires data to test the efficacy of pesticides and to help a crop become labeled for a pesticide. Current IR-4 research is ongoing with respect to fungicide efficacy for CLR.

This bill focuses on providing subsidies for the use of a fungicide named Priaxor, which is a useful product when a systemic fungicide is recommended. This material is applied a limited number of times, and at a low rate per acre. CTAHR supports the

initial use of this fungicide and recommends fate and transport considerations be addressed at the same time due to its long chemical half-life. Subsidies are effective when used to direct activities of agricultural operations. This subsidy will have a significant influence on addressing CLR in the state.

This bill directs the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) to spend funding on pesticide education and training. CTAHR Cooperative Extension Service can work with HDOA on this task. CTAHR already has an Extension Agent in Kona that is engaged in education and training. HDOA is also tasked with developing Integrated Pest Management Strategies to combat CLR. CTAHR can also help HDOA on this task.

The UHM and CTAHR testifies in strong support of this bill.