



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Tuesday, March 2, 2021 at 9:30 a.m.

By

Nicholas Comerford, Dean
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 337 SD1 – RELATING TO SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, and members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 337 SD1 relating to the use of cover crops and green manure. A cover crop is defined as a crop grown for the protection and enrichment of the soil; while green manure is defined as a cover crop that is used to fertilize the soil by either fixing a nutrient like nitrogen (a legume) or being plowed back into the soil.

It has been well established for decades that cover crops provide strong and long-lived benefits to agriculture and environmental quality. A cover crop reduces the amount and speed of runoff. The result is reduced erosion and loss of surface soil. A cover crop increases soil structure through the action of its roots; and thereby can increase water holding capacity. A cover crop, because many have two-thirds of its biomass below-ground, can have a strong influence on soil carbon sequestration thereby promoting soil health and storing atmospheric carbon in the soil.

The best use of a cover crop is when it is accompanied by conservation tillage, such as no till or strip till processes. A green manure crop has a potential disadvantage if it is plowed back into the soil, because of the effect that plowing/cultivation has on carbon loss and soil structure destruction.

SB 337 SD1 references a CTAHR database for crops that would be eligible under this bill for reimbursement. The website <https://cms.ctahr.hawaii.edu/soap/SOFT/Resources/Sustainable-and-Organic-Topics/cc-gm> is a source that would be useful to mention.

The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports the intent of this bill but is aware of the current financial climate of the State of Hawai'i and realizes that state funding is reduced. For the next fiscal biennium, the University of Hawai'i Board of Regents approved a budget request for the University that was flat and did not seek any increased funding to the University. UH defers to the Department of Agriculture on their priorities.

UH suggest that given the role that both of these materials have on protecting soil from erosion and that this is a pilot project, that farming operations which encompass large acreages be given preference. This would allow the maximum benefit for the environment and for improving soil health.