



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
And

Senate Committee on Higher Education
Thursday, February 17, 2022 at 3:05 p.m.

By

Nicholas Comerford, Dean
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources

And

Michael Bruno, PhD
Provost

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 2959 – RELATING TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Chairs Gabbard and Kim, Vice Chairs Nishihara and Kidani, and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment and Senate Committee on Higher Education:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 2959 relating to the University of Hawai'i that proposes a full-time agricultural education coordinator in the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR), University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

As mentioned in SB 2959, CTAHR convened the P-20 Agriculture Education Working Group and the major recommendation contained in the group's final report to the 2019 legislature was the recommendation to appoint an agriculture education coordinator. This bill is a continuing attempt to act on that recommendation.

SB 2959 states that developing the agriculture education programs and hiring the coordinator to oversee and enhance them state-wide will result in solving one of the problems associated with Hawai'i agriculture...namely the perceived lack of new farmers.

We believe that the work done by the Working Group was highly collaborative and valuable; and that the need for such a program is justified. If such a bill is passed and funded, the agriculture education coordinator would be stationed in CTAHR. Under that assumption, this would be a full-time staff position, Education Specialist, within the office of the Associate Dean of Academic and Student Affairs in CTAHR. This position would support the on-going work that already exists in CTAHR with outreach to schools within Hawai'i including:

- the Hawai'i OneAg program that includes nearly all community college and 4-year agriculture programs in the UH system,
- Gene-ius Day classes for students in grades 1-12,
- mentoring programs in grades 9-12 at Hawai'i Title I schools, and
- the Hawai'i AgDiscovery program for high school students.

However, it must also be realized that the major outcome of such a program may not be a new breed of farmers, but a much better educated electorate; with a possible interest in post-secondary education in agriculture and natural resource fields.

The CTAHR experience in new farmer training is epitomized by the GoFarm Hawai'i program. This program has for the past 8 years trained and graduated between 50 to 70 certified farmers per year, totaling more than 400 new farmers in the state. Seventy percent of these graduates remain in farming either on their own farms or are employed as farmers.

GoFarm Hawai'i has found over the years that the success of new farmers is a function of real life, hands-on training in the operation of crop production and the agribusiness of farming. All of this is packaged in a passion to do the hard work required of farming given the potentially low profit margin facing most farmers. To be successful even these new farmers need access to land, capital investment and continued education and assistance. GoFarm Hawai'i's experience is that when this is done through a classroom environment, it often does not identify those with the real passion for the job. Expectations should be realistic.

In summary, the University of Hawaii supports SB 2959 as this fits the basic mission of CTAHR, and provided that its passage does not replace or adversely impact priorities as indicated in our BOR Approved Budget.