



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
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SB 2990 – RELATING TO SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the intent of SB 2990 on establishing a cover crop reimbursement pilot program to be administered by the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA).

Soil health and agriculture sustainability has been shown to be dependent on protecting, maintaining and increasing soil organic matter. Cover cropping is one tool that has shown to be effective in building soil organic matter which results in maintaining soil stability during a fallow period, increasing soil water retention capacity, increasing soil nutrient retention and release capacity, and enhancing soil microorganism biodiversity. Cover cropping can be a tool in a cropping system that has value during a fallow period or can also be an intra-rotation crop with its own economic value. The bill establishes a temporary position to manage the program, recognizing that HDOA is suffering from lack of sufficient personnel.

This bill establishes a three-year pilot program to reimburse producers for some of the costs of cover cropping run by HDOA. We recommend the following concept be added to the purpose of the pilot program: For producers to evaluate the economic cost-benefit of cover cropping to prepare for the time when subsidies end. Further, that producers use this pilot program to evaluate profit producing cover crop opportunities; as it would add to the post-subsidy and economic viability of cover cropping that will be necessary in the long-run.

The University of Hawai'i supports the intent and language of SB 2990 and have provided comments on additional language. We defer to HDOA as to whether the amount of temporary staff and subsidy funding is sufficient to allow the department to meet the stated goals.