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## A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO TARO.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1           SECTION 1. Taro (kalo, or Colocasia esculenta) has been a  
2 plant of central importance to the survival of the Hawaiian  
3 people since their arrival in these islands an estimated one  
4 thousand two hundred years ago. Hawaiians recognize taro as  
5 their elder brother and hold this relationship as sacred.

6           The famed taro-growing places of Hanalei, Kauai; Waikapu to  
7 Waihee and Keanae-Wailua nui, Maui; Windward, Oahu; Halawa,  
8 Molokai; Kohala, Waipio, and the dryland systems of Kona,  
9 Hawaii; and many other sites represent one thousand two hundred  
10 years of continuous cultivation that has preserved taro for  
11 residents and millions of tourists annually and provided habitat  
12 for Hawaii's endemic and endangered waterbirds and other fauna.

13           In the past, traditional taro cultivation fed many  
14 Hawaiians, and today, it continues to contribute to the health  
15 and well-being of all Hawaii residents. The poi, taro, and luau  
16 (taro leaf) in local diets is recognized by physicians as having  
17 conclusive and positive effects on health.



1 Taro has provided the people of Hawaii with food and  
2 livelihood; contributed to the education of students from pre-  
3 school through graduate school, from the arts and culture to the  
4 sciences; and enhanced the economic abundance and vibrancy of  
5 the State through its contributions to art, research, jobs,  
6 value-added products and product-imaging, and tourism.

7 While this agricultural crop utilizes barely one per cent  
8 of all agricultural lands in production in Hawaii in 2005, it is  
9 the most significant cultural crop in the State. The cropping  
10 system designs, diversity of traditional production methods, and  
11 diversity of varieties of taro found in Hawaii are unique in the  
12 Pacific. No other area in Polynesia has refined the growing of  
13 taro to such a high degree.

14 Only an estimated five hundred acres out of many thousands  
15 of acres of agricultural lands remain in taro cultivation in the  
16 State in 2006. Commercial taro production fell from four  
17 hundred thirty acres to three hundred fifty acres in the last  
18 five years. Threats to the continuation of taro cultivation are  
19 many, including: crop diseases; the invasive apple snail  
20 (*Pomacea canaliculata*), which accounted for up to twenty-five  
21 per cent crop loss and fifty per cent of labor increases for  
22 taro farmers in 2005; feral pigs, which destroyed several major



1 traditional Hawaiian taro variety collections in the last few  
2 years; and the rising costs of living, land values, leases, and  
3 taxes, all of which are making growing taro an endangered way of  
4 life and have the potential to put a multi-million dollar sector  
5 of the economy out of business within the next five years.

6 At one time, there existed three hundred to four hundred  
7 varieties of taro developed by Hawaiians, each with its own  
8 unique characteristics of color, shape, hardiness, fragrance,  
9 and flavor. In 1934, only eighty-four varieties were  
10 documented. Today, less than seventy-five varieties have been  
11 found, although there is hope that more may be recovered. All  
12 of the original Hawaiian taro variety collections set aside to  
13 preserve this unique heritage from the 1930s to the present are  
14 now incomplete and in need of recovery. Many of the ancient  
15 varieties are at risk of disappearing completely because their  
16 populations number less than five known plants.

17 The purpose of this Act is to recognize and designate kalo,  
18 the ancient taro-growing systems and places throughout the  
19 State, and the traditional taro-farming lifestyle as unique and  
20 cherished resources contributing to the special identity,  
21 economy, and well-being of Hawaii and in critical need of  
22 protection.



1 SECTION 2. Chapter 195D, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
2 amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated  
3 and to read as follows:

4 "§195D- Kalo; unique and endangered. (a) The kalo  
5 plant (Colocasia esculenta), the traditional kalo varieties  
6 developed by Hawaiians, and the traditional kalo-growing places  
7 are recognized as unique and cherished resources important to  
8 the identity, economy, health, and well-being of the State and  
9 in need of increased protection.

10 (b) The chairperson of the board of land and natural  
11 resources shall increase protection of indigenous wetland and  
12 dry land kalo varieties and historic taro-growing places, while  
13 providing for continued cultural utilization and agricultural  
14 cultivation.

15 (c) The chairperson of the board of agriculture shall  
16 increase support for taro farm survival through farmer-agency  
17 pest control collaboration and the protection of taro purity,  
18 indigenous kalo varieties, and taro markets."

19 SECTION 3. New statutory material is underscored.

20 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2008.

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~~John~~  
Melie Canoe

INTRODUCED BY:

Melie Canoe

JAN 23 2008



Tony W.  
Rep. H. H.

**Report Title:**

Kalo (Taro)

**Description:**

Recognizes kalo (taro) as a unique and cherished resource in need of protection.

