

JAN 24 2007

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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, Kaua'i; Waikapu  
7 to Waihee and Keana'e-Wailua nui, Maui; Windward, O'ahu; Halawa,  
8 Moloka'i; Kohala, Waipi'o, and the dryland systems of Kona,  
9 Hawai'i; 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  
16 lū'au (taro leaf) in local diets is recognized by physicians as  
17 having conclusive and positive effects on Hawaiian health.



1 Taro has provided the people of Hawai'i 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 vibrance 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 represented barely one per  
8 cent of all agricultural lands in production in Hawai'i in 2005,  
9 it is the most significant cultural crop in the State. The  
10 cropping system designs, diversity of traditional production  
11 methods, and diversity of varieties of taro identifies Hawai'i  
12 as unique in the Pacific. No other island in the region has  
13 refined the growing of 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 varieties collections set aside to  
13 preserve this unique heritage from the 1930's 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 designate kalo as unique and  
18 in danger of extinction.

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



1           "S195D- Kalo; unique and endangered. (a) The plant,  
 2 kalo (Colocasia esculenta), the traditional kalo varieties  
 3 developed by Hawaiians and the famed kalo-growing places of  
 4 Hanalei-Haena, Kaua'i; Waikapu to Waihee and Keana'e-Wailua nui,  
 5 Maui; Windward, Oahu; Halawa, Molokai; and Kohala, Waipio, and  
 6 the dryland systems of Kona, Hawaii is recognized as unique and  
 7 in danger of extinction in the State of Hawaii.

8           (b) The chairperson of the board of land and natural  
 9 resources shall protect strains of indigenous kalo that are in  
 10 danger of extinction, while providing for continued cultural  
 11 utilization and agricultural cultivation."

12           SECTION 3. New statutory material is underscored.

13           SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2007.

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INTRODUCED BY:

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**Report Title:**

Kalo (Taro)

**Description:**

Recognizes kalo (taro) as unique and in danger of extinction.

