

LINDA LINGLE
Governor



State of Hawaii
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
1428 South King Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96814-2512

SANDRA LEE KUNIMOTO
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

DUANE K. OKAMOTO
Deputy to the Chairperson

TESTIMONY OF SANDRA LEE KUNIMOTO
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2008
2:00 P.M.
ROOM 308

SENATE BILL NO. 2915, S.D.2
RELATING TO TARO

Chairperson Oshiro and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill No. 2915, S.D. 2, relating to taro. The purpose of this bill is to create the Taro Security and Purity Task Force and to appropriate funds for that purpose. The department supports the intent of this bill with amendments; however, we have concerns about the possible adverse budgetary impact that this bill may have on the Executive Supplemental Budget request.

During the 2007 legislative session, taro farmers and members of the Native Hawaiian community expressed growing concern over increasing threats to taro. From the onset, the issues surrounding taro have been more culturally based than agricultural. Our department acknowledges and agrees with the Native Hawaiian community and taro growers that the task force should be housed within OHA for administrative purposes. Our department will support and participate in this collaborative effort, acknowledging that our expertise lies in the agricultural and biosecurity components.

The department also offers a recommendation that the bill be amended to go beyond the current scope and add objectives that promote long-term viability for taro farms, such as taro education and training programs, programs to maximize business viability and success, taro farming grant programs, and research and control programs for apple snail.

The key to the protection of taro is finding solutions through the promotion of active dialogue among all concerned sectors and stakeholders.

Personal Testimony Presented
before the
House Committee on Finance
March 27, 2008
2:00 p.m.
by
Dr. Andrew G. Hashimoto

SB 2915, SD2, Relating to Taro

Chair Oshiro, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Andrew Hashimoto. I serve as the Dean of UH Manoa College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) and an ex-officio member of the Board of Agriculture. I am pleased to provide this personal testimony on Senate Bill 2915, SD2, which creates the taro security and purity task force and appropriates funds for that purpose. This testimony does not represent the position of the University of Hawaii.

I support SB 2915, SD2.

CTAHR recognizes and respects the cultural significance of Hawaiian taro. We know that recent years have seen heated debate as to what our college's role should be in protecting this beloved crop. We have been participating in dialogue with taro farmers from each island, the Hawaii Department of Agriculture, the Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation, and the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. The parties engaged in this dialogue feel that an important next step is to form a taro security and purity task force that will guide policy and prioritize research, education, and preservation efforts to sustain taro farming in Hawaii and help taro growers achieve greater economic viability.

CTAHR looks forward to participating on the task force and welcomes this opportunity to work closely with and receive feedback from taro growers throughout the state. I am confident that the formation of this task force will create learning opportunities and exchanges that can help secure the future of taro and taro-growing communities in Hawaii.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.

**Written Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Finance**

March 27, 2008 at 2:00 p.m.

by

Dr. Gary K. Ostrander
Vice Chancellor for Research and Graduate Education
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 2915 SD2 - Relating to Taro

Chair Oshiro, Vice Chair Lee, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 2915 SD2.

In October 2007, SCR 206 afforded a representative cross section of the community to come together to discuss the critical problems facing taro production in Hawai'i today. The stakeholders present that day successfully began a dialogue addressing problems and potential solutions for issues ranging from importation regulations to invasive species.

I am here to voice our support for the continuation of that dialogue.

SB 2915 SD2 establishes a much needed task force dedicated to finding cooperative solutions for the protection of taro. This bill is critical because it requires all stakeholder groups to work together. We believe that only through a commitment of cooperation and community engagement will any protection or security program truly be successful. Therefore, I eagerly urge you to support this bill.



Maui County Farm Bureau

*An Affiliate of the American Farm Bureau Federation and Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation
Serving Maui's Farmers and Ranchers*

TESTIMONY

SB2915, SD2 RELATING TO TARO

HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Chair Oshiro and Members of the Committee:

My name is Warren Watanabe, Executive Director of the Maui County Farm Bureau, a non-profit general agriculture organization and an affiliate of the Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation.

MCFB on behalf of our member farmers, ranchers and agricultural organizations, respectfully requests your strong support of SB2915, creating a taro security and purity task force and appropriating funds for that purpose.

“Knowing your crop” is a basic tenant for successful coexistence of various agricultural practices. A diversified array of agricultural practices will be critical to ensure long term sustainability of a vibrant and strong agricultural industry in Hawaii. MCFB, respects the cultural importance of taro and supports efforts to protect culturally important taro varieties. We therefore strongly support the creating of a taro security and purity task force with funding to identify and implement Best Management Practices to accomplish these goals.

In recognition of the hearings associated with SB958, we respectfully request that the task force be directed by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs in consultation with the Department of Agriculture. The major concern for this initiative is to protect the cultural integrity of important native taro species. As such it is reasonable that the lead agency be the Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

Your support by approving these measures with amendments delegating authority to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs will help sustain and grow agriculture for tomorrow.

We respectfully request your support towards the passage of this measure with amendments.

HAWAII FARM BUREAU FEDERATION
2343 ROSE STREET
HONOLULU, HI 96819

March 27, 2008

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

TESTIMONY ON SB 2915
RELATING TO TARO

Chair Oshiro and committee members:

My name is Alan Takemoto, Executive Director, of the Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation, which is the largest non-profit general agriculture organization representing approximately 1,600 farm and ranch family members statewide.

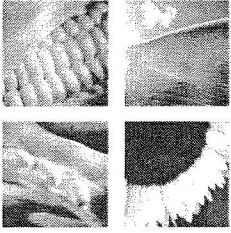
The Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation supports SB 2915, which creates the taro security and purity task force and appropriates funds for that purpose.

This measure is aimed to assist the taro farmers to be able to fully discuss the many production issues facing the taro industry. SCR 206 approved in last year's Legislative Session gave impetus for the taro industry and respective organizations to come together in a cohesive and collaborative manner to discuss taro farmer production issues such as apple snail devastation, taro leaf blight, and pocket rot disease.

Farm Bureau supports this effort to improve the taro farmer's ability to not only sustain themselves but also to expand and improve their long term success. We offer any assistance that our organization can provide to help in this process.

We urge this committee to approve the passage of this measure.

Thank you.



Hawaii Crop Improvement Association

Growing the Future of Worldwide Agriculture in Hawaii

Testimony by: Paul Koehler

SB 2915sd2, Taro

House Finance

Thursday, March 27, 2008

Room 308: 2:00 pm – Agenda #1

**HCIA 2007-2008
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Position: Strong Support

Chair Oshiro and Members of the Finance Committee:

My name is Paul Koehler. I am a Maui resident, Past-President and sitting Board Member of HCIA. The HCIA represents seed production and research facilities operating in Hawaii. The HCIA is comprised of five member companies that farm an estimated 8,000 acres on four islands, valued at \$97.6 million in operating budget (2006/2007 HASS). We are proud members of Hawaii's diversified agriculture and life sciences industries.

Appreciation is expressed for this and other positive taro measures introduced this year. While HCIA member companies do not grow taro, nor do we plan to grow taro, we have and continue to support the preservation and protection of taro in Hawaii. As testified in other sessions, HCIA respects the cultural significance of taro, and supports the Hawaiian community's discussion of research and development for taro.

We offer our support of SB 2915sd2, which seeks to provide funding to support the continuation of the discussion under the auspices of SCR 206. In addition, we are in support of the proposed amendments to change the lead agency from the Department of Agriculture to the Office of Hawaiian Affairs with OHA taking the cultural lead, and with DOA providing the lead on agricultural matters.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony.

TO: Representative Marcus Oshiro, Chair
House Finance Committee

FROM: Penny Levin

DATE: Thursday, March 27, 2008
(Submitted by email)

Aloha honorable Chair and Committee members;

I am testifying as an individual and a taro farmer from Maui in strong support of SB2915 which requests the establishment and funding of a taro security and purity task force. I am also a member of 'Onipa'a Nä Hui Kalo, a statewide organization of taro farmers, as well as a participant of the SCR206 dialogue.

There have been decades of research and decision-making by agencies and institutions regarding taro without taro farmers. We've been considered "cooperators" rather than "collaborators" or "partners." This task force represents the first time that all the agencies and institutions involved in taro research and crop security are willingly at the table with us. We find that to be a refreshing and encouraging change.

The collective message from SCR206 dialogue participants last year was – let this continue, and let it be funded so that taro farmers can afford to participate and real action, based on agreed upon priorities, can occur.

Taro farmers also said; let us be the voice that leads so that research and action will stem from the lo'i and not from the clouds; not out of touch with the realities of taro farmers' lives and conditions.

There are a number of amendments from taro farmers which were to be submitted in the House Agriculture Committee. Because the bill was passed directly to the Finance Committee, these amendments are important to address. In order to ensure that these amendments are complete, I attach those portions of the bill with changes herein (Sections 2, 3 and 8).

Each portion of work outlined in the task force bill is a critical piece of a whole. They will provide all participants in this ongoing dialogue with the needed guidance for non-gmo alternatives to taro issues and actively support priorities set by the task force. The bill will also provide long-overdue support to one of the most important and complete traditional Hawaiian taro cultivar collections in the state (which has gone unfunded for more than two decades); the collective updating of Bulletin 84 (which has gone unfunded since the need was first expressed more than 15 years ago); and to gathering information for task force for decision-making.

Funding is also necessary to provide for someone to coordinate and record the task force's efforts and so that taro farmers can afford to be at the table. It needs to be allocated IN THIS YEAR so that the dialogue and positive actions begun in Oct 2007 and described in the taro farmers' SCR206 Report to the Legislature can continue without interruption.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.

Penny Levin

Report Title:

Taro Security and Purity Task Force; Appropriation

Description:

Creating the taro security and purity task force and appropriating funds for that purpose. (SD1)

THE SENATE
TWENTY-FOURTH LEGISLATURE,
2008
STATE OF HAWAII

S.B. NO. 2915
S.D. 1

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO TARO...

[amendments per taro farmers' recommendations; as underlined]

SECTION 2. There is established the taro security and purity task force. For administrative purposes the taro security and purity task force shall be placed within the ~~department of agriculture.~~ Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

SECTION 3. The taro security and purity task force shall consist of the following members or their representatives (one each):

- (1) The department of agriculture;
- (2) The office of Hawaiian affairs;
- (3) The University of Hawai'i; and
- (4) The Hawai'i Farm Bureau Federation;
- (5) 'Onipa'a Nā Hui Kalo;

The taro security and purity task force shall ...

SECTION 8. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawai'i the sum of \$650,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2008-2009 to be allotted as follows:

- (1) ~~\$250,000~~ \$375,000 for the convening and implementation of the taro security and purity task force; including the conducting of dialogues and the implementation of task force priorities on all islands; for retaining the minimum of at least one person to facilitate, coordinate, communicate, and record the work of the taro security and purity task force; and for preparing the final report to be submitted to the legislature.
- ~~(2) \$100,000 for retaining the minimum of at least one person to facilitate, coordinate, communicate, and record the work of the taro security and purity task force;~~
- ~~(3)~~ (2) \$150,000 for archival and ethnographic research of the history of taro and taro practices in Hawai'i and the traditional Hawaiian cultivars to aid in its revival and to revise Bulletin 84: Taro Varieties in Hawai'i (1939) which is the key reference for taro growers and researchers; and

~~(4)~~ (3) \$125,000 for protection of the Moloka'i taro varieties collection, the oldest and most complete collection and source of taro varieties in Hawai'i, and.

~~(5)~~ ~~\$25,000 for preparing the final report to be submitted to the legislature.~~

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the ~~department of agriculture~~ Office of Hawaiian Affairs for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 9. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2008.

FINTestimony

From: jim cain [kinglulau@hotmail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, March 26, 2008 4:23 PM
To: FINTestimony
Subject: sb9215

From: postmaster@mail.hotmail.com
To: kinglulau@hotmail.com
Date: Wed, 26 Mar 2008 10:46:44 -0700
Subject: Delivery Status Notification (Failure)

This is an automatically generated Delivery Status Notification.

Delivery to the following recipients failed.

replee@hawaii.gov

--Forwarded Message Attachment--
From: kinglulau@hotmail.com
To: replee@hawaii.gov
Subject: sb2915
Date: Wed, 26 Mar 2008 17:46:43 +0000

House Finance Committee

Rep. Marcus Oshiro, Chairman

Rep. Marilyn Lee, Vice-Chair

My name is Jim Cain, my family and I are taro farmers and commercial poi processors from Waipi'o Valley, island of Hawai'i. I am submitting testimony in support of Sb2915 that establishes a taro security and purity task force to provide support for taro farmers. As a major proponent and one of the original authors of the bill, I wish to convey that there is broad support amongst the taro farming community, and DOA, UH, and OHA to look at ways to mitigate challenges that are facing the taro farming industry. Many of these challenges mirror challenges that all diversified ag faces in Hawai'i. I would like to propose some changes to the bill as follows:

Section 2. This program would be better suited in OHA. Taro and poi are more than

an agricultural commodity, but are at the root of Hawaiian culture. Solutions need to be culturally sensitive and appropriate and OHA would be more responsive to the needs of taro farmers. Also, proximity to OHA will help facilitate the possibility of matching funding to help with programs that evolve from the task force.

Section 3. (4) Instead of Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation, that has no members who are taro farmers, insert and include Onipa'a Na Hui Kalo, the only state-wide organization of taro growers, and cultural practitioners. Onipa'a has a track record that is over 10 years long of providing support for taro growers around the state and includes yearly efforts to restore taro patches around the state, as well as publications such as A Guideline for Taro Lo'i Restoration, and Community Based Solutions for Apple Snail Control.

Also, taro farmers who participate in the task force should be eligible for a daily stipend of \$100. Taro farmers should be honored for the expertise they bring to this effort. All agency people are getting paid for their participation.

Section 8. \$375,000 shall be appropriated for convening and implementing the taro security and purity task force, including conducting discussions on all islands and contracting at least one person to facilitate, coordinate and communicate the work of the task force.

\$150,000 for ethnographical research and restoring Bulletin 84

\$125,000 for maintaining and distributing the Moloka'i collection

\$25,000 for putting together the final report for the legislature

The task force is seen as a way to get input from taro farmers on the challenges and the solutions that the poi industry faces. The agencies are a critical component in implementing these solutions. On behalf of the taro farmers of Waipi'o Valley, mahalo for your support.

Jim Cain, 775-9001

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