

## House Committee on Agriculture

**LATE**

February 7th, 2013 9:15 am

### **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1184 by Anthony Aalto, Chair Sierra Club O'ahu Group**

Aloha Chair Wooley and members of the Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

The question at the heart of this bill is simple: does it make sense for the Legislature to set an aspirational goal for the amount of food to be grown in the state for local consumption? The answer is surely a resounding yes.

Such a goal is not just a rhetorical device. It *will* help drive change.

The example of the Hawaii Clean Energy Initiative is extremely instructive. Nothing in the HCEI guaranteed that the state would in fact move away from its highly dangerous reliance on imported carbon-based fuels. But, once formalized, the HCEI created the context for a slew of legislative, regulatory and market-driven initiatives that are helping to make the goal a reality: mandatory solar hot water; rebates for PV (to be backed now, possibly, by on-bill financing); wind farms; a third boiler for H Power; new energy building codes, a booming PV industry; a growing private energy audit, analysis and consultancy sector etc... As a result HECO now says it is on track to meet the 2015 requirement of 15% energy from renewable sources, something few believed possible as recently as 5 years ago. And in this process PV installation has grown so fast that it accounts for 17% of the statewide construction sector, helping generate significant employment and sales tax revenues.

A food production goal would almost certainly have the same galvanizing effect on the Legislature, the Administration, the counties and the private sector. This bill is not nearly as ambitious as the HCEI, which mandates 70% of our energy should come from clean and alternative sources by 2030. The goal for food is to double our current production - which best estimates indicate to be about 8% to 10% of current consumption. So by the year 2025 we could be growing 20% of the food we eat. Yipee! In truth, though an improvement, it would not provide a level of security from supply disruption or global food price inflation that should make anyone feel comfortable. Doubling our food production should be a start, not an end.

The economic impact should not be underestimated: a food-growing agricultural renaissance in Hawaii will help diversify our economy and almost certainly help create an agricultural added-value sector: agro-tourism, restaurants, food

processing etc. It could also help create a new agricultural export niche with boutique quality products bringing much needed revenue to the state – as our coffee does now. By now everyone knows the estimates in the 2008 CTAHR report of food self-sufficiency: increasing local food production by just 10% would keep more than \$300 million in-state, generate farm gate sales of more than \$90 million; have an economic multiplier effect of more than \$180 million; produce profits of nearly \$50 million; return \$6 million to the state in sales tax revenues and create more than 2300 jobs. Imagine that impact several times over...

This bill does nothing more than legislate the very same goal that has repeatedly and publicly been voiced by Governor Abercrombie and by the Chair of the Department of Agriculture: to double the amount of food we grow in Hawaii. It is high time that the Legislature set a serious and reasonable target to get Hawaii moving on the path to self-sufficiency enshrined in our Constitution.

Mahalo

anthony aalto