
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE PROTECTION OF TARO.

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

1 SECTION 1. Hawaii imports eighty-five per cent of its
2 food. In 2011, the department of agriculture pointed out that
3 the State is most at risk for staple starches. Taro (kalo) is
4 the most culturally significant food plant in Hawaii and also
5 one of Hawaii's highest yielding staple starch food crops,
6 producing between 10,000 and 30,000 pounds per acre per annum
7 under current wetland cultivation practices. Hence, taro plays
8 a critical role in food security for the State.

9 The State produces approximately four million pounds of raw
10 taro on an estimated five hundred to six hundred acres (three
11 hundred eighty acres in commercial lo'i) statewide and imports an
12 additional two million pounds or more annually. Collectively
13 this does not meet local demand which is diversifying as value-
14 added producers and consumers become more educated about kalo,
15 poi, and pa'i'ai. This demand is expected to grow as Hawaii
16 moves towards greater local food self-sufficiency. Growing
17 local also significantly reduces the threat of new taro pest and



1 disease introductions from raw taro imports, a critical and
2 necessary step for improving biosecurity control measures and
3 reducing the high costs associated with control efforts.

4 Access to affordable taro lands remains a major challenge
5 for young taro growers striving for success, greater family food
6 self-sufficiency, and community well-being. In 2009, the taro
7 security and purity task force, established under Act 211,
8 Session Laws of Hawaii 2008, found "no logical reason why we
9 should continue to import any type of taro to meet local needs"
10 and provided a series of recommendations for improving taro and
11 taro farmer success. In its 2010 and 2014 reports to the
12 legislature, the task force recommended greater protections for
13 wetland taro lands (lo'i), including their structural elements,
14 such as terraces, kuauna or paepae pohaku (stone walls), and
15 'auwai (irrigation ditches) within the boundaries of the State's
16 public conservation districts to help meet food security needs
17 and to support community and cultural resilience in the face of
18 the rising costs of imported food for local families. The task
19 force also found that these key agricultural structures for
20 wetland taro production are frequently destroyed, severed, and
21 built upon due to gaps in land use designations, historic



1 preservation records, planning, laws, and agency policies,
2 making the need for improved taro land protections more urgent.

3 Over the last five years, the taro security and purity task
4 force has documented a strong and growing desire among Hawaii's
5 younger generation of farmers, potential farmers, and community
6 groups, to plant kalo and return to the lo'i on each island to
7 grow food, care for their families, create places of education
8 and renewal, and perpetuate Hawaiian culture.

9 As global warming and sea-level rise continue in the
10 Pacific and Hawaii, existing lowland agricultural sites,
11 particularly lo'i kalo, will disappear or become inundated with
12 brackish water, raising the question of where we will grow our
13 food in the future. At this time, since the State has no
14 measures in place to protect the necessary upland taro-growing
15 lands, we will need to mitigate these changes.

16 Historic, long-fallowed lo'i kalo lands can be found on
17 public conservation lands within most ahupua'a on each island and
18 point to an opportunity for greater food productivity and a
19 chance to address the looming issue of food security in the face
20 of sea-level rise.



1 The taro security and purity task force estimates between
2 five thousand and seven thousand acres of historic lo'i lands may
3 be found within state conservation districts based on maps
4 developed by the office of Hawaiian affairs and department of
5 land and natural resources during the 2014 legislative session,
6 or less than three per cent of all department of land and
7 natural resources lands.

8 There is a compelling interest in preserving wetland taro
9 lands and their supporting structures on public conservation
10 lands under the jurisdiction of the department of land and
11 natural resources for these purposes.

12 Chapter 171, Hawaii Revised Statutes, entitled "Public
13 Lands, Management and Disposal of", outlines the laws for land
14 use specifically and only for public lands. Section 171-10,
15 Hawaii Revised Statutes, describes the allowable land uses on
16 public lands. The taro security and purity task force finds
17 that wetland taro lands are highly productive but often classed
18 as marginal under the existing categories of paragraph 1,
19 section 171-10, Hawaii Revised Statutes, relating to intensive
20 agriculture use.



1 The purpose of this Act is to improve protections for
2 wetland taro lands (lo'i kalo) and ancient wetland agricultural
3 structures on undeveloped state-owned or -acquired conservation
4 lands for Hawaii's long-term future food security and well-
5 being.

6 SECTION 2. (a) The board of land and natural resources,
7 in conjunction with the taro security and purity task force,
8 shall create an inventory identifying public lands that qualify
9 as potential taro lands.

10 (b) The board of land and natural resources shall submit a
11 report of its findings and recommendations, including any
12 proposed legislation, to the legislature no later than twenty
13 days prior to the convening of the regular session of 2016.

14 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
15 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so much
16 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2015-2016 and the
17 same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year
18 2016-2017 for the purposes of section 2 of this Act.

19 The sums appropriated shall be expended by the board of
20 land and natural resources for the purposes of this Act.

21 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2050.



Report Title:

Classification of Agricultural Lands; Taro Lands; Appropriation

Description:

Requires the Board of Land and Natural Resources to create an inventory of taro lands, in conjunction with the Taro Security and Purity Task Force. Appropriates funds. (SB774 HD1)

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