

LATE

SB

313

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SB313

Submitted on: 2/4/2015

Testimony for WTL on Feb 4, 2015 14:45PM in Conference Room CR224

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
David Z. Arakawa	Land Use Research Foundation of Hawaii	Support	No

Comments: LURF supports the appropriation to the Department of Land and Natural Resources for the operational expenses and staffing costs of the Hawaii Association of Conservation Districts.

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Hawaii Association of Conservation Districts

Testimony in Strong Support of SB 313

Good afternoon Chair Theilen and members of the Committee on Water and Land

I am Karen Ah Mai, chair of the South Oahu Soil and Water Conservation District and representing the Hawaii Association of Conservation Districts, made up of 16 districts across the state.

I would like to provide a context on why funding for the Hawaii Association of Conservation Districts is so important.

First, agriculture is growing in importance in Hawaii. From US Department of Agriculture statistics, the economic value of agricultural products has grown between 2007 and 2012. For the island of Hawaii, the 2012 market value of agricultural products was \$247 million (22% increase since 2007); for Kauai, \$65 million (43% increase); for Maui, \$188 million (35%); and for Oahu, \$161 million (28%) increase. The state total market value for agricultural products was \$661 million, a 29% increase. The trend is toward increasing growth. The number of farms is increasing on Oahu, due to the transition from plantations to smaller plots. On the Neighbor Islands, the number of farms is down, but the average acreage is larger. On all islands, the majority of the farms are less than 10 acres.

Second, there is increased concern over food sustainability in case of disaster, along with increased demand for local products and concerns on food safety

Our concerns with growing agricultural sector is that many of the farmers are new to the industry. On Oahu, the transition from pineapple and sugar to smaller scale agriculture has encouraged a proliferation of first generation and immigrant farmers.

Farm types and assistance needed:

- Large farms: already pretty well versed in techniques, food safety, and environmental protection
- Federal Farm Bill clients: stable land tenure, equipped with conservation plans on how to farm responsibly with respect to US agricultural standards
- Small farmers: farmers with needs, known or unknown, to responsibly handle the crops and land to keep the ag lands productive and sustainable
 - we are speaking about county rules and regulations regarding grading, grubbing, and stockpiling
 - irrigation such that neighboring parcels are not victims of inadvertant or irresponsible irrigation practices
 - responsible use of fertilizers and pesticides
 - techniques of crop management: rotation, cover crops

Role of the Soil and Water Conservation Districts

- work with county engineers, who are more oriented toward construction than agriculture to provide the technical input on standards for grading and grubbing permits
- work with the spectrum of farmers on best practices
- whereas federal programs direct their resources to those who can meet their standards of stable land tenure and national priorities, there are many who do not qualify, who do not want to be in a government program, or who just need some help in doing things the right way
- using the facilities of our partner, the NRCS, we have conservation specialists who go out and provide conservation technical assistance to those who do not qualify for or who do not want the complexities involved in governmental assistance
- this is a relatively low-cost way to mitigate inadvertant damage to our ag lands

We are asking for your help in being able to maintain this program.

- it had been funded by a barrel tax allocation but that ceased in 2012. HDOA has temporarily funded one conservation specialist per county to assist.
- the demand is such that we cannot keep up with the requests for service
 - Conservation Technical Assistance, directly to the farmers
 - outreach events
 - counties have provided some funding, but briefly, it is proportionate to the importance of ag in the island economies; the biggest growth is on Oahu but the support from City and County of Honolulu is low compared to the risk of food sustainability in the event of a disaster

While we would love to have a full complement of staff to be able to service the needs, we are asking only to maintain the current level of state support until we are able to develop a more stable income source to cover the costs of delivering the services

Summary

- the economic value of the agricultural sector is growing: from \$512m in 2007 to \$161m in 2012, a 29% increase statewide
- state support for technical assistance services has decreased from about \$330,000 to 0
 - until a stable funding model can be developed, the SWCDs need the state government to assist in the delivery of technical assistance services to those farmers who are critical in the movement toward food sustainability and economic viability in the state

We strongly support this bill and ask for your support in making it possible for the growing agricultural sector to prosper sustainably, and contribute to the economic well-being of the population in Hawaii. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.