



Maui County

September 17, 2018

HEARING BEFORE THE
Committee on Policy, Economic Development and Agriculture

TESTIMONY ON
PEA71: APPROVING THE ACQUISITION OF APPROXIMATELY 262 ACRES IN
PULEHUNUI AND OMAOPIO (MAKAWAO)

Maui County Council Chamber
August 20, 2018, 9:00 AM

Aloha Chair Sugimura, Vice Chair Crivello, and Members of the Committee:

I am Warren Watanabe, Executive Director of Maui County Farm Bureau. We are a County Chapter of the Hawaii Farm Bureau, representing 200 farm families and organizations on the island. Our mission seeks to protect and increase the viability of farms and ranches while ensuring the social and environmental wellbeing of the island.

MCFB strongly supports PEA71 beginning the process to expand the Maui Agricultural Park System.

This is a huge opportunity for Maui's farmers. Farmers who do not own their own land such as myself when I was farming are usually tied to a revocable lease meaning at the end of the lease year, it could be revoked at any time. Yet, farmers are farmers. We are passionate with what we do and invest recognizing the risks and built careers and raised families on the land. This is what built Maui. Dusty Road Farms, parts of the Uradomo Onion Farm are examples. Yet times have changed and that handshake agreement with the landowner does not have the same meaning. Therefore, this land purchase by the County will create an opportunity for farmers to invest with security.

Recent rains and the global travel are also evolving agriculture. Weather and increased pest pressures create issues beyond the control of farmers. New pests often appear without notice, placing crops at risk while rain and wind can destroy a crop overnight. Larger area means ability to rotate crops and plant at multiple sites. Farmers in the current ag park are interested in expansion. The lands they currently have do not provide for crop rotations while meeting marketing agreements. And you know that Maui is a buyers' market. Too often if you do not commit, wholesalers will buy from Oahu or the continent and no longer purchase from you. We hear too often from

wholesalers that the problem with Hawaii's farmers is an unreliable supply. This will happen if you only grow for a specific market without excess that can be used for other purposes while serving as the supply when things get rough. That is how it was in the past when containers of produce from Maui fed the west coast. Maui was largely self sufficient as it fed the rest of the State and the West Coast. Today's land purchase starts us on that road. Maui's ag can again be part of our economic engine while supporting families and preserving the rural working landscape we all treasure. Don't forget, ag lands without a farmer is only open space.

We appreciate A&B's commitment to providing water to the parcel. It is not often you get such a deal. The location on the upper edges of the former plantation with soil type the same as the existing ag park give greater assurance of its' success. Yes, investments still need to be done but it is no different from when we go into new areas. All other ag parks in the State have started with less. We need to embrace this opportunity and move forward.

I apologize for not being at this meeting, however am at a Food Technology Board meeting, critical to opening doors to value added product expansion for these farmers. Farm Bureau respectfully requests your strong support to move this measurer forward. Thank you.