



Maui County

August 20, 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.

The Maui Island Plan specifically highlights as one of its goals:

"Protection of Maui's Small Towns and Rural Character. Outside of growth areas development will be limited to preserve our agricultural lands and open space. This will keep the country - country, a refrain repeated by many citizens."

The country appeal is tied in to agriculture – vistas of fields of crops and pastures for livestock. Yet agriculture does not happen because we wish it. It requires policy support from entities such as this body, land, water, infrastructure, labor and the list goes on. Bottom line, it requires commitment and effort to make it happen. This measure is an example of such a commitment.

The existing ag park is the largest contiguous body of diversified agriculture on Maui and there is an urgent need for expansion. At one time, the ag park met the needs of our farmers, but times have changed, and so have the needs of our farmers. This opportunity to expand into former HC&S lands, coupled with State funding to purchase the lands and improve infrastructure moves a vision into reality. Many of our farmers are land short.

Farmers on Oahu, occupying the Central Plains have large parcels of land, allowing practices such as crop rotation. Our land limited farmers who depend on farming as their sole source of income often cannot afford this practice due to its' impact on their revenue stream.

PEA71, expanding Ag park lands, gives farmers and ranchers the opportunity to utilize crop rotations, temporary fallow with cover cropping, and other best management practices that reduce pest populations, boost soil health and improve the water holding capacity of croplands and pastures. Again, these basic practices are essential for land stewardship and sustainable agricultural productivity.

We are currently working with entities such as the Department of Education to expand the revenue base of our farmers. Timely access of these lands is critical. We also urge careful analysis during implementation to ensure that unintended consequences to our existing Ag Park do not occur.

Maui was the breadbasket of the State up to the 80s. The potential exists and the industry is ready and willing to accept the challenge to make agriculture an economic engine for Maui County again.

We respectfully request your strong support for this first phase of expanding our Ag Park system by passing this measure today. Farm Bureau is ready to assist as needed to ensure its' timely implementation. Thank you for this opportunity to provide our opinion on this important matter.