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To the Honorable Yuki Lei Sugimura

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Testimony with comments on PEA-37

Regarding a user-friendly farm plan process across County agencies

Aloha Kākou Chair Sugimura, Vice Chair Crivello and members of the Committee,

It is with gratitude in my heart I come before you today, as it seems the intent of this hearing is to help farmers lessen their paperwork burden. Let me just say that HFUU supports a streamlined and user-friendly farm plan submission process.

What would also be healthy for our future is if the farm plan is required to be implemented within a reasonable time of the final building inspection of the first farm dwelling. It is my understanding that it is only the second building permit that triggers the requirement for farm plan implementation.

Farm plans are the beating heart of the farming operations across Maui County. To me, farming means managing living and non-living systems, and without good plans to follow and modify as needed, these systems can be very difficult to manage. Thus, farm plans are extremely important in the farmers decision making process especially when doing a budget.

An important thing for policy makers to remember is that farming is a career choice, and most good farmers can make a lot more money doing other things like construction or management. So it will be a great thing if Maui County promotes lots of policies that are farmer friendly, and that uplift the producer and incentivize their choice to be a producer.

Good and regionally coordinated farm plans could make Maui an agricultural powerhouse once again.

If farm plan implementation was more widely enforced and ag district property owners were compelled to be in compliance with the 51% ag use rule (for ag tax rates), property values in the agriculture district would likely decline. This is because most people don't want to be farmers. Therefore most people would think twice before buying into the agriculture district on Maui. Perhaps they would buy a residential lot, or a rural lot instead of an ag lot. The economic policies must be reworked in Maui County to favor farmers, or we won't have many.

There are ag. property owners on Maui that just draw up a farm plan so they can get their farm dwelling building permits. Maui County Code Chapter 19.30 regulates and defines farm plans

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and farm dwellings. Using the farm plan to get a primary residence without farming is not the intent of 19.30 which defines farm dwellings:

"Farm dwelling", as used in this paragraph, means a single-family dwelling located on and used in connection with a farm

Maui farmers need to have clustered housing, not unlike Hali'imaile, where I used to live. State statute allows for this, Maui County Code does not.

Article XI Section 3 of the constitution says:

*The State shall conserve and protect agricultural lands, promote diversified agriculture, increase agricultural self-sufficiency and **assure the availability of agriculturally suitable lands**. The legislature shall provide standards and criteria to accomplish the foregoing.*

Agriculturally suitable lands are not available to me in any meaningful sense of the word available. While I can get on the land and farm, I must rent and live elsewhere. Therefore the cost of living on Maui makes farm land economically "unavailable" and not suitable to most farmers, and a difficult career choice for many, making meaningful agricultural self-sufficiency a far-off dream.

Since it is obvious that Maui County needs to get farmers on the land, while also providing communities for people to live in, what may be a promising idea to consider is the upzoning of certain areas in the agriculture district on Maui. This must be coupled with stricter enforcement of the agriculture zoning ordinances in the ag district to encourage compliance or migration to non-agriculture areas. This way, Maui County can, "Conserve and protect agricultural lands, promote diversified agriculture, increase agricultural self-sufficiency and assure the availability of agriculturally suitable lands."

If this kind of policy becomes a priority, it would probably stimulate a reorganizing of the agricultural district population centers (Hana, Haiku, Lahaina, Kula, Kihei, etc..) into rural or residentially zoned areas (with a strong tax base), and create a surplus of available farm lands for sale, which should cause the land price to possibly drop to levels where farmers can afford to purchase.

Many people live in what their plans call "Farm Dwellings", but are those individuals farming? Many are, and some are not. Let's get farmers on their farms growing our food, fiber, fuel, and medicine in the near, medium and long term. Let's make Maui a good place to live as a farmer once again.

With Aloha,

Simon Russell

HFUU State Legislative Chairman