

## **Member Day Testimony to the Agriculture Committee**

Chairman Peterson, Ranking Member Conaway and members of the Agriculture Committee:

As a former member of the House Committee on Agriculture from 2003 through 2006, I appreciate your allowing me to share my thoughts on issues important to our agricultural community both nationally and in my home state of Hawai‘i. It was just as true then as it is today that American agriculture doesn’t much care about partisanship and in fact is a unifier across our nation.

As you may remember from my prior service, one of the key agricultural issues facing my home state of Hawai‘i is invasive species and diseases. Invasives are a major issue throughout our country, but especially in Hawai‘i and other isolated areas where, because of our unique ecosystems, natural resources and agricultural crops, they have devastating effect requiring extraordinary prevention and mitigation actions.

Hawai‘i is the most isolated island chain and one of the most ecologically diverse places in our world. Hawai‘i is 2,282 miles from the Continental United States, 2,952 miles from Japan and 4,772 miles from Washington, DC. Plants and animals that found their way to Hawai‘i

evolved to thrive in this isolated ecosystem. A 2014 survey identified 9,975 endemic species in Hawai‘i. These species include the Hawaiian scarlet honeycreeper, the ‘i‘iwi; the flowering evergreen, the ‘ōhi‘a lehua; and the state bird of Hawai‘i, the nēnē.

Hawaii’s unique circumstances also have given rise to one of our nation’s most diverse and productive agricultural communities. With ecosystems ranging from desert to tropical and with a year-round growing cycle, our crops have ranged throughout our history from the highest quality sugar and pineapple and cattle to tropical specialty crops like fruit and cut flowers in the highest demand worldwide.

Yet it is exactly because these crops like our natural resources have adapted to Hawaii’s uniqueness that they are the most susceptible to devastation from external species against which they have no natural defenses. I sought to crack down on a lax regime to prevent and curb invasives with my introduction in 2005 of H.R. 3468, the Hawai‘i Invasive Species Prevention Act, modeled after New Zealand and other isolated jurisdictions with then like now the most stringent invasive species prevention regimes in the world.

Since then, the consequences to Hawai‘i of insufficient invasive species prevention have worsened materially. For example, 195 new invasive species have been introduced to Hawai‘i. These have only added to

Hawaii's unfortunately warranted description as the extinction capital of the world. Although we will never know the true number of species that have gone extinct in Hawai'i, in the last 200 years, 28 bird, 72 snail, 74 insect and 97 plant species have gone extinct, and of the 1,274 listed endangered species of animals and plants, 502 are from Hawaii. The state has nearly 40% of the nation's endangered species. Additionally, another 15 are listed as threatened in Hawai'i.

This accelerating negative effect on our environment and loss of biodiversity is of course a major concern from not just a natural resources perspective but agricultural. In fact, invasive species have drastically impacted agriculture in Hawai'i, threatening some of the island's most valuable crops in the state's third-largest industry.

As just a few examples, the coffee berry borer, which was discovered in Kona in 2010, now infects all of the coffee growing islands in Hawai'i except Kaua'i. The coffee berry borer can cause yield losses of between 30 and 35 percent and affects the quality of the coffee beans, directly impacting the income of growers.

Hawaii's third most valuable crop, the macadamia nut, is under threat from the macadamia felted coccid. Macadamia Felted Coccid has been found in all of Hawai'i Island's prime macadamia growing regions. The felted coccid reduces macadamia tree output by draining nutrients from

the tree. Invasive species coupled with increased rain led to a 22 percent decline in the macadamia nut harvest this year compared to last year. Increased research, eradication and quarantine dollars are needed to mitigate these invasive pests and prevent other pests and diseases like the coffee leaf rust from entering the state. I especially want to thank this Committee for including the Macadamia Tree Health Initiative in last year's farm bill and for your continued support for the Coffee Plant Health Initiative and tropical and subtropical research. These critical initiatives provide research and extension grants and research support to crops that are vital to Hawai'i agriculture.

I will soon introduce an updated and strengthened version of my Hawai'i Invasive Species Act. I would deeply appreciate this Committee's careful consideration of my proposal given the unique challenges we face in preventing and controlling invasives and the severe negative consequences to Hawai'i from failing to do so.

In addition to invasive species, I want to urge the Committee to continue its great work on specialty crops, sustainability programs, conservation programs and rural housing. When I previously served on the Agriculture Committee, most of Hawai'i unique crops were not covered by crop insurance, but through efforts by me and my then and later colleagues and the sustained support of this Committee, crop insurance now covers more than 130 crops. USDA conservation programs have

been an essential component in helping local Hawai'i products become more sustainable. USDA rural development programs have helped address Hawaii's housing crisis in our farming communities. These programs have proven themselves in Hawai'i as they have elsewhere throughout our country,

In closing, thank you for your leadership in helping our nation's agricultural producers and for your consideration of Hawaii's unique invasive species and agricultural and rural development needs.