

Agriculture Appropriations Member Day Testimony

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member and members of the Subcommittee, mahalo for the opportunity to testify before you today.

While the days that sugar and pineapple were Hawaii's main exports are long over, Hawai'i agriculture remains a vibrant industry and one of Hawaii's main economic drivers. Although I'm a member of the Full Committee, I felt compelled to highlight the critical programs that support Hawai'i agriculture and domestic producers around the nation.

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 effects requiring extraordinary prevention and mitigation actions.

These 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 range from the highest quality coffee and macadamia nuts to corn seed and cattle to tropical specialty crops like passion fruit and cut flowers.

However, the consequences of insufficient invasive species prevention has significantly harmed Hawai‘i. In just the past 15 years, it is estimated that 195 new invasive species have been introduced to Hawai‘i.

I want to thank the Subcommittee for its continued support of invasive species programs and language that has helped address invasives in Hawai‘i like fruit flies, coffee berry borer, macadamia felted coccid, avocado lace bug, little red fire ant and two-lined spittle bug. Furthermore, increased funding for the Agricultural Quarantine Program has provided that critical first line of defense that prevents these additional invasives from reaching the continental United States.

However, there is a vital need for new funding for coffee leaf rust research. In October 2020, coffee leaf rust was discovered on coffee plants on Maui Island and has since spread to most of the Hawaiian Islands. Unmanaged or ill-managed farms can experience yield losses greater than 70 percent and lead to tree mortality. This has the potential to wipe out the Hawai‘i coffee industry, which is one of the state’s most significant agricultural exports valued at more than \$148.4 million when converted to roasted products.

While USDA's efforts to control the spread of coffee leaf rust in Hawai'i have been a necessary band-aid, longer-term Agricultural Research Service funding for research into resistant varieties and management tools is critical for the viability of this iconic Hawai'i industry.

In addition to invasive species, I want to ask the Subcommittee for its support of Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, whose funding has generally remained stagnant. In addition to 4-H and Future Farmers of America, grant programs for Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions help schools like the University of Hawai'i train the next generation of agricultural leaders. This is desperately needed in Hawai'i, where the average age of a farmer is 60 years old.

I lastly want to urge the Subcommittee to continue its support for specialty crops, especially tropical and subtropical crops. The tropical regions of the world are estimated to contain half of the species on earth and have numerous opportunities for expansion. The tropical crops that we all love, like cacao, guava, mango and taro, and are starting to be produced domestically in greater quantities but can't receive research funding like other crops. They are hampered by limited local resources and limited access to national resources.

Tropical and Subtropical Research is listed as a high-priority research and extension area; however, it appears the National Institute of Food and Agriculture has lacked targeted funding to implement a Tropical and Subtropical Research Program as it has for other high-priority areas. Given more exacerbated threats from climate change and increased risks from invasive species in these climates, tropical and subtropical research is more needed than ever. Targeted research funding in the space would help the small and minority farmers that drive this industry.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and its effect on the tourism and hospitality industry, have affected most industries in Hawai‘i, including our farmers. While COVID-19 assistance from the USDA and SBA has been a vital lifeline for our farmers, we must continue to invest in domestic agriculture to help our agricultural producers bounce back and thrive.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today and for all of your hard work that goes into this bill. I also want to thank the Subcommittee staff, especially Martha Foley and Perry Yates, for all of their assistance and willingness to listen to my office.

Mahalo.