

House Appropriations Committee, Agriculture Subcommittee

Member Day Hearing

Representative Jill Tokuda (HI-02)

10:00 AM Thursday, March 23, 2023

Chairman Harris, Ranking Member Bishop, and distinguished members of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

As a member of the Agriculture Committee, I recognize the important role agricultural producers play in our economy and lives. We rely on farmers and ranchers across our nations every day, for the food we eat, the clothes we wear, and the fuel we need. However, farming is a hard way to make a living. From long hours to variable weather to workforce shortages, we ask farmers to do so much, while too many are just scraping by just to get to the next planting season.

Farmers in Hawai‘i face all the same challenges faced by those on the continent but also have to manage them on islands, with very limited land; in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, 2,500 miles away from California; with new invasive pests and diseases entering the state and threatening different specialty crops seemly every year.

You play a critical role in ensuring that our farmers, ranchers, and researchers throughout the nation have the support they need to be successful. Thank you for your great investments in agriculture in Fiscal Year 2023.

Today, I want to highlight a few programs that have been critical in Hawai‘i, and ask for your help in ensuring they receive needed funding to continue their impact in my home state.

First, thank you for consistently providing funding for the Micro-Grants for Food Security Program since it was authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill. The program provides microgrants to small producers and community organizations in Hawai‘i, Alaska, and the territories to increase the quantity and quality of locally grown food in food-insecure communities. With the pandemic and the high cost of food in these areas, demand for the program has greatly outpaced current funding. I request that you fully fund the Micro-Grants for Food Security Program in Fiscal Year 2024 at its authorized level of \$10 million to ensure the program can fully help those that are looking to provide food for themselves and their communities.

Next, Minority Serving Institutions play a vital role in increasing access to education in agriculture and related sciences to make our nation’s agricultural sector more competitive. The University of Hawai‘i is a Native Hawaiian-Serving Institution and Land-Grant University. In addition to essential capacity funding, the Alaska Native-Serving and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions Education Competitive Grants Program has been critical to carrying out education, applied research, and community development programs that would otherwise struggle to receive funding. For example, UH has been a world leader in tropical flower variety development, which is critical to Hawai‘i’s floriculture industry. Fully funding the ANNH program at its authorized level of \$10 million is desperately needed to meet the increased challenges we face today, such as expanding research to support Hawai‘i staple crops like kalo (taro) and ‘ulu (breadfruit) be more resilient to drought and weather impacts.

Furthermore, direct specialty crop research funding has been in essential for iconic Hawai'i agricultural industries like Kona coffee and Hawai'i macadamia nuts. Thank you for your continued support for the Coffee Plant Health Initiative and Macadamia Tree Health Initiative, which have played a key role in combating invasive diseases like coffee leaf rust and pests like Tropical nut borer. I ask for your continued support for these initiatives and ask for your help to add some funding for Avocado and Spittle Bug, which you've recognized through report language for the last two Congresses.

Lastly, as I've highlighted multiple times during my speech, invasive species threaten agricultural producers around our nation. Investments in prevention are a matter of national security and are significantly cheaper than mitigation efforts and losses once species are introduced. Funding for programs like the Agriculture Quarantine Inspections Program and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is critical to our food security and agricultural industry.

Chairman Harris, Ranking Member Bishop, thank you again for your time today. I look forward to working with you and the subcommittee on issues facing our growers.

Mahalo.