

## ACT 211

S.B. NO. 2915

A Bill for an Act Relating to Taro.

*Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:*

SECTION 1. The legislature recognizes the need to develop non-genetic modification based solutions to protect taro from disease and insects on a statewide basis. In Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 206 (2007), the legislature requested the department of agriculture to develop a taro security and purity research program to save and protect taro from natural attack.

In 2007, 1,800,000 pounds of taro were imported to Hawaii. Under existing biosecurity rules, the department of agriculture was unable to inspect much of the imported taro to protect existing taro crops in the State.

At the same time, taro farmers are struggling with high rates of pest and disease infestation, rising crop and land costs, lack of access to quality water and land resources, a decline in crop cultivar biodiversity, and a decrease in the number of families continuing the taro farming lifestyle. Taro and taro farms are important in helping to promote Hawaii's economic vitality in agriculture, tourism, health and wellness, and education and the arts. Taro and taro farms help to sell Hawaii to the world.

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 206 (2007) requested the department of agriculture (DOA) to collaborate with taro growers and various native Hawaiian groups to develop and adopt a program that would:

- (1) Allow DOA's biosecurity program to protect crops in Hawaii by inspecting foreign crops upon entrance to the state, thereby preventing any viruses or insects from entering the State;
- (2) Allow alternative forms of research on taro other than genetic modification;
- (3) Provide public outreach, engagement, and education on taro research and protection; and

- (4) Request the United States Department of Agriculture to have the Alomae/Bobone virus disease complex and taro beetles designated as “actionable pests” in the findings of the United States Department of Agriculture and DOA report to prevent the entry of these pests into Hawaii from foreign countries.

DOA initiated a dialogue with taro farmers from each island, researchers and representatives from the University of Hawaii, the Hawaii Farm Bureau, and the office of Hawaiian affairs to produce a joint report describing the outcomes and recommendations of the participants. The joint report, including proposed legislation, was forwarded to the legislature.

One of the primary recommendations of that report was to form a taro security and purity task force to guide policy and prioritize research for the protection of taro in Hawaii.

To ensure that the task force would have the full participation of taro farmers who have faced crop hardships for many years without financial assistance and whose resources are limited, the participants recommended that funds be appropriated for the task force for fiscal year 2008-2009.

The purpose of this Act is to establish the taro security and purity task force and appropriate funds for the formation and operation of the task force with full participation of taro farmers from all islands.

SECTION 2. (a) There is established the taro security and purity task force that shall be placed within the office of Hawaiian affairs for administrative purposes.

(b) The task force shall include one representative from each of the following:

- (1) The office of Hawaiian affairs;
- (2) The department of agriculture;
- (3) The department of land and natural resources;
- (4) The University of Hawaii;
- (5) Onipa‘a Na Hui Kalo; and
- (6) The Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation.

The task force shall also include a minimum of two representatives from the taro farming communities of each of the islands of Kauai, Oahu, Maui, Molokai, and Hawaii, and one representative of botanical gardens or taro collections in the State.

At no time shall less than fifty per cent of the task force be comprised of taro farmers.

The members of the task force shall select a chairperson from among its members.

The task force members shall serve without compensation but shall be reimbursed for expenses, including travel expenses, incurred in the performance of their official duties.

(c) The task force shall prioritize its objectives, which shall include, but not be limited to the following, in order to ensure that it is able to sufficiently address and render conclusions:

- (1) Develop guidelines, protocols, and recommendations for taro policy, non-genetic modification based taro research, and the allocation of resources to ensure that taro is saved and protected in Hawaii;
- (2) Develop a program of incentives and projects that have the support of a broad spectrum of taro growers that will enhance taro security, protect taro purity, provide support to taro farms and farmers, and improve taro markets for the long-term;
- (3) Support the recovery of traditional Hawaiian taro cultivars throughout the State;

- (4) Increase public awareness of the value of taro and its role culturally, socially, in health and well-being, environmentally, and economically in the State;
- (5) Develop a program to provide taro education and training opportunities;
- (6) Develop a program for commercial taro growers to maximize business viability and success;
- (7) Develop a taro farming grant program to assist taro farmers in need to preserve the cultural legacy of taro farming for future generations;
- (8) Discuss the feasibility and impact of requiring the department of land and natural resources to provide reduced lease rent rates for taro farmers on state-leased land; and
- (9) Develop taro research and outreach for the control and eradication of apple snails.

(d) The task force shall meet at times and locations to be determined by its members; provided that the first meeting of the task force shall be no later than three months after the effective date of this Act.

(e) The task force shall submit a preliminary report to the legislature documenting the status of its progress no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of 2009. The task force shall submit a final report to the legislature summarizing its program, the results achieved, actual expenditures, and recommended legislation no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of 2010.

SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of ~~\$325,000~~ \$0<sup>1</sup> or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2008-2009 to achieve the objectives of the taro security and purity task force, which may include:

- (1) Convening and operating the task force, including conducting discussions on all islands;
- (2) Contracting at least one person to facilitate, coordinate, communicate, and record the work of the task force;
- (3) Conducting archival and ethnographic research of the history of taro and taro practices in Hawaii and the traditional Hawaiian cultivars to aid in its revival and to revise Bulletin 84: Taro Varieties in Hawaii (1939) which is the key reference for taro growers and researchers;
- (4) Protecting the Molokai taro varieties collection, the oldest and most complete collection and source of taro varieties in Hawaii;
- (5) Conducting taro research and outreach for the control and eradication of the apple snail; and
- (6) Preparing the preliminary and final reports to be submitted to the legislature.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the office of Hawaiian affairs for the purposes of this Act; provided that no funds shall be expended unless matched on a dollar for dollar basis by the office of Hawaiian affairs.

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2008.

(Approved July 3, 2008.)

#### Note

1. Item vetoed, replaced, and initialed "LL" on July 2, 2008.