

**REPORT TO THE TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE  
2010 REGULAR SESSION**

**URGING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PLAN FOR INCREASING AID AND  
ASSISTANCE TO CERTIFIED ORGANIC FARMERS**

**IN RESPONSE TO SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION NO. 38**



**STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**DECEMBER 2009**

## **Background**

Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 38 was introduced by Senator Robert Bunda and stated in part:

WHEREAS, organic farming practices benefit human health and advance the preservation of environmental quality; and

WHEREAS, organic farming practices emphasize sustainability and enhance soil health; and

WHEREAS, organic farming promotes the practice of growing agricultural products without the use of toxic substances, such as pesticides and fertilizers; and

WHEREAS, organic farming is an important building block for maintaining and preserving the State's scenic and environmental resources; and

WHEREAS, organic farming is also an essential element in creating economic viability and preserving the quality of life in rural and agricultural communities; and

WHEREAS, organic farming has gained popularity in the State; and

WHEREAS, local organic production, processing, and distribution cannot at this time meet the local demand for organic products; and

WHEREAS, the importation of organic products from the mainland and other countries can result in an increased number of invasive species in Hawaii; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Twenty-fifth Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2009, the House of Representatives concurring, that the Department of Agriculture is urged to develop a plan to increase aid and assistance to certified organic farmers.

There were no funds appropriated to develop this plan and therefore the Hawaii Department of Agriculture had limited resources to divert for this purpose and had to depend on the cooperation of organic farmers, and our partners, the Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation, and the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in order to begin the planning process.

## **Planning Activities**

In September 2009, the Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDOA) convened the first organic meeting in an effort to obtain a definition of "aid and assistance" from the organic farming community. The meeting was attended by seven members of the organic community including farmers from other islands, Hawaii Organic Farmers

Association (HOFA) and Hawaii Cooperative of Organic Farmers (HICOF) representatives and organic retailers.

The attendees concluded that:

1. The group focus should be on developing a plan but that “aid and assistance” needed to be defined by the organic community.
2. Local funds (state, HDOA) are not available. Some planning funds are available from federal resources.
3. Organic foods are in demand.
4. Organic foods are more expensive than non-organic.
5. The organic market is growing.

Action Items:

1. The organic community needs to develop organizational partnerships in order to bring as many organic community voices into the meetings as possible.
2. The planning group needs to conduct some outreach to determine what other states or organizations do to assist organic farming.

The Hawaii Department of Agriculture hosted the next organic meeting on Wednesday October 21<sup>st</sup>. An attendee paid conference call-in number was provided as an attendance alternative for Neighbor Island participants. The purpose of this meeting was to develop a preliminary plan with action items and a timeline. One person attended in-person and seven others were on the conference call. Due to the limited participation, neither the preliminary plan nor the timeline was developed.

### **Other Related Activities**

- The planning group was notified in late September that the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources can provide financial support for food safety training and audit services and may reimburse farmers and other organic food supply chain members (distributors, retailers, packing houses, processors and restaurants) up to \$700 for food safety related supplies, and \$300 for food safety audits.
- During HOFA’s annual meeting, an informal poll of approximately 60 attendees was conducted. The results are as follows:
  1. University of Hawaii, CTHAR should expand and include organic farming in grant submissions and research funds.
  2. DBEDT should earmark funds for organic.
  3. HDOA Market Development branch should help to develop an organic market and information program.
  4. HDOA should initiate a legislative agenda for organic production.
  5. HDOA should designate an office for organic advocacy.

While these are goals that can be explored in the future, the current economic climate precludes the establishment of any new programs or increases in funding.

A more reasonable goal for the organization that could be started now is exploring ways to educate retailers, farmer's markets and the consumer in the use of the word "organic", its legal and ethical implications and how complaints might/should be filed with HOFA.

- HICOF & HOFA collaborated to survey their organic farmer members in order to obtain member ideas for input to the SCR38 process.

The survey was mailed to 330 people in October. Thirty people responded (9.1%).

Respondents listed their priorities as follows:

1. Agricultural inspection/quarantine measures to prevent incoming pests and diseases.
2. GMO free areas/districts/islands.
3. CTAHR require that a percentage of grants support organic production.
4. UH College of Tropical Agriculture (CTAHR) expand support of sustainable and organic farming.
5. Grants for organic crop or processing projects/innovations.
6. Earmark as "organic" a percentage of all funds allocated to agriculture.
7. Certification fee compensation/reimbursement increase/new programs.
8. Advocacy in the legislature to represent organics in agriculture.
9. Educational workshops on marketing.
10. Online Hawaii Organic Product Directory to help consumers contact producers (HOFA has launched at [hawaiiorganic.org](http://hawaiiorganic.org)).
11. Retailers/Farmers Markets directive/education re: legal use of the term 'organic'.
12. Clarification of National Organic Program Rule regarding: Body care products, Fertility amendments, Apiculture, Hydroponics, Aquaponics.
13. HDOA designate an "Office for Organic Advocacy" & "State Organic Advocate".

14. Agricultural Inspectors for outgoing products.
15. Food Safety rules appropriate for Hawaii's small scale agricultural ventures, unique climate, and crops.
16. Refrigerated storage at docks for organic and conventional products.
17. Educational workshops on new opportunities.
18. Articles about Hawaii organic products/producers in mainstream magazines, trade journals.
19. HDOA initiate legislative agenda for organic.
20. HDOA (Marketing Br) develop an "organic marketing and information" program.
21. Educational workshops on management.
22. Twitter/Facebook/YouTube integrated with organic website to expand awareness.
23. DBEDT earmark funds for organic marketing and advertise grant opportunities.
24. Collection of statistics on organic production, processing, retailing in Hawaii (helps specify areas of greatest need for grant assistance).

## **Next Steps**

At the initial planning meeting held in September 2009, it was felt that it was critical to define what exactly the organic farming community meant by "aide and assistance". The results of the survey now allow the planning group to move forward with the development of a plan that addresses specific needs. The next meeting of the planning group will take place in February 2010 to continue the process.

HDOA will continue to assist in the development of the plan as resources allow and will help to create a larger planning committee that will have shared responsibility for creation of the plan. Following the plan completion, HOFA and HICOF will be responsible for implementation of the plan.