LEGISLATIVE REPORT

SUBJECT: Requesting State Public Entities to Commit to Healthier and More Nutritious Meals in Their Programs by Spending More of Their Food Dollars for Locally-Produced Produce or Other Hawaii Agricultural Products


ACTION REQUESTED: Report on the status of respective purchases and use of locally-produced produce or other Hawaii agricultural products and any recommendations for improvements in meeting this goal.

DOE REPORT: Findings:

Referencing the Report to the Twenty-Sixth Legislature in response to SCR121, SD1 and HD1, the challenges of procuring locally grown produce for the Hawaii Department of Education (HIDOE) remains the same, cost, procurement, supply, and safety certification of local farms.

Locally grown produce is geared towards a higher priced niche market, such as hotels, restaurants, or for export. Institutional food service programs do not have the budget to purchase high end produce.

Produce vendors distinguish the “origin” of fresh produce, by country, not state. In a survey done in 2009, with Hawaii Island Farm Bureau members, only one of 650 indicated they sell to the State. Farmers have not actively participated in this market, and there is no incentive for wholesalers to purchase local.

As a first step to maximize use of local produce, and abide by USDA procurement requirements, School Food Services Branch, HIDOE, asked produce vendors to deliver local first, whenever possible, if the price is the same as, or less than produce identified from out of state.

Due to the size of the Hawaii public school system, local farmers do not produce the quantities needed to sustain the requirements of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funded meal programs.
RECOMMENDATIONS: The legislature should encourage farmers to combine farmland into cooperatives that focus on growing conventional produce geared for institutional markets, by creating incentives to support agricultural expansion for farmers willing to produce crops used by state institutions.

Create legislation to mandate food-safety certification for all local farms so local produce will meet food safety standards required by USDA child nutrition programs.