

Agriculture Leadership Foundation of Hawaii

Class XI

Healthy Land & Society: A Case for Farm Bill Reform

In order to contribute to Healthy Land and a thriving sustainable society in Hawaii, Class XI of the Ag Leadership Foundation of Hawaii proposes farm bill reform that addresses the following issues. Sustainable agricultural practices offer improvements in soil erosion control and water use efficiency, a reduction in water contaminants, and can provide more opportunities for local growers to compete with large agri-businesses. Such practices are an important part of the future of agriculture, but support for such programs remains scarce compared to other facets of our Ag policies. The 2007 Farm Bill has the opportunity to reduce support for largely subsidized crops such as corn and soybean that contribute to the processed-foods health crisis by adopting programs that provide children with better access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Such programs would show America's small farmers that their products are just as valuable to our communities as the corporate farms producing tens of thousands of acres of corn, wheat, and soybean.

Despite a decline in diversified agriculture in Hawaii, farming must remain a vital part of island life to maintain our present quality of life. Geographical isolation increases Hawaii's dependence on imports, most notably for food and fuels, increasing vulnerability to rising oil costs and instability in the global marketplace. Environmental stewardship programs are critical as society begins to understand the value of green areas and responsible land use. Hawaii is one state that receives little benefit from the vast majority of Farm Bill programs, so programs that focus on specialty crops, environmental stewardship, locally grown food, sustainable biofuels production, and the improvement of our livestock production efficiency are key to whether or not the Farm Bill can be considered a successful food, farm, & bioenergy bill for the State and the country for the next 5 years.

Hawaii's agriculture is at a critical juncture. It is time to fight for programs that are vital to our specialized producers. The Agricultural Leaders from Class XI include professionals from various specialties including ranching, botanical and cultural preservation, ag-tourism, commodity crops (sugarcane and pineapple), research, and diversified farming. Despite disparate interests, Class XI collectively advocates for a Food & Farm Bill that:

- Maintains the vitality and competitiveness of the agricultural sector by supporting a wide diversity of crops with an emphasis on crops for human consumption
- Enables development of local food systems by supporting local distribution outlets, value-added production facilities, localized storage and transportation facilities
- Encourages energy independence by supporting sustainable biofuel production that is renewable and decentralized
- Initiates programs to develop the capacity of small and medium-sized producers of livestock and produce to meet food safety requirement without imposing cost-prohibitive regulatory requirements
- Supports innovation in agriculture that will allow farmers to meet the new challenges facing our industry in the 21st century