

Fear of pesticides and GMOs may drive out Kauai's biotech industry

Kauai's GM seed industry, which plays a "significant" role in Kauai's economy, has been facing obstacles recently—namely the fear of genetically modified crops and pesticides. Consumer opposition led to the passing of a Bill 2491, which severely restricts the use of GMOs and chemical pesticides.

However, scientists and researchers in the GM seed industry say that there has been no evidence that GMOs have caused any harm. The amount of pesticides used on GM corn is also considerably lower than what sugar growers were allowed to use when sugar was a major crop on Hawaii, says Stephanie Whalen, executive director of the Hawaii Agriculture Research Center.

"Almost no serious [agriculture] scientist worries about GMOs or pesticides currently used on corn," says James Brewbaker, agricultural researcher at the University of Hawaii.

First Hawaiian Bank economist Jack Suyderhoud, who recently examined Kauai's economy, says that while the basis for the fears are controversial, "what is not controversial is that if Kauai loses this part of its economic base, it will be impossible to replace in the near future—with significant economic impacts on the island."

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