Proposed anti-GMO bill in Kauai, Hawaii targets agricultural innovation and research

Large agriculture companies and landowners are opposing a bill that would establish “agronomics” as a new and separate real property tax class and exclude lands used primarily for crop research or parent seed production from the county’s definition of “agricultural use.” The Hawaii Crop Improvement Association, a trade group representing the agricultural seed industry in Hawaii, says the proposal singles out a subset of local agriculture and would send a negative signal to any industry that relies on innovation to create jobs and contribute to the local economy.

“Business sectors should not be targeted for discriminatory treatment,” HCIA wrote in testimony.

Kauai County Councilman Tim Bynum introduced Bill 2546 in May. He says the county code was written with the intention of giving tax breaks to those growing crops to be sold rather than for research and development. He said the current law was never meant for large ag and the companies “should never have been eligible” for the tax incentives they are currently receiving under their designations.

“This is simply a bill that asks the question, ‘Is this ag activity that we want to incentivize with tax benefits that impact the County of Kauai and what other taxpayers pay?’” he said.

Tom Shigemoto, vice president of Alexander & Baldwin, Inc., which owns about 7,000 acres of agricultural land on Kauai’s South Shore, said imposing additional financial challenges on large scale ag operations may result in those entities scaling back operations or relocating. “Should any of these actions occur, we believe that this bill may have the unintended consequences of jeopardizing the long term viability and sustainability of Kauai’s agricultural industry,” he wrote.

Read the full, original article: Large ag says tax change targets them unfairly