

**FARM BILL FORUM – KONA HAWAII**

**November 12, 2005**

**Testimony of Virginia Isbell  
Hawaii County Council**

The Honorable Undersecretary Tom Door, Deputy Undersecretary Merlyn Carlson, Governor Lingle, Representative Case, Mayor Kim – welcome to Kona and Aloha.

This week we are celebrating Kona Coffee and this is also the time coffee is in full blast, all picked by hand. This island has more farmers per capita than any other island in the state. But we are also the most diversified from flower growers, papaya, mac nuts, avocado, vanilla bean, truck farming and the list goes on.

Since we have thirteen of the sixteen climatic conditions in the world we can grow just about anything. But we are also the most isolated.

Tourism is one of our greatest assets, but with it comes travelers from all over the world who often carry with them plants, fruits, that are diseased or infected with results like fruit fly, white fly, or small travelers like the couqi frog. **Q. How can you help us with disease and pest control?**

Land is expensive in Hawaii but we would like to encourage students to enter the Ag industry. One barrier is the huge capital cost to farm. **Q. How should Farm Policy address the needs of potential next generation of farmers to encourage rather than discourage them?**

The University of Hawaii research department is noted worldwide and receives Federal grants to develop unique hybrids for coffee, Mac nuts, fruits, vegetables, flowers and pharmaceutical plants. However, these scientists are also allowed to sell the newest hybrids to third world countries who then compete with our local farmers. **Q. How should farm policy be designed to maximize U.S. (Hawaii) competitiveness and our country's ability to compete in global markets?**

We desperately need funded positions that assist our local Soil and Water Conservation volunteers, especially a Conservation Specialist. We receive a small amount from the County because we review Grading Permit requests. But we have no way of doing a thorough job as volunteers. In the last Farm Bill passed by Congress the paid professionals in Research and Conservation Districts are not allowed under the "Privacy Act" to share information to the local district volunteers. This makes no sense at all and needs to be re-visited and re-vamped. **Q. Will you please amend that portion of the present Farm Bill?**

Because of our unique soil, climate and environmental differences which can occur within a 5-mile radius, a conservation specialist would know these factors and adapt them in practices for

farmers to achieve high yields. We need to modify Hawaii Tropical Forest Recovery Act of 1992 (PL 102-574, 1992) and include our unique feature. **Q. Will your support us and provide Conservation Specialists in rural farm areas?**

**Q. Since farmers are becoming such a minority throughout the U.S., can we designate a new category of those in the minority as "farmers"?**

**Q. Can we extend foreign trade zones to include farms?**

**Q. Can the federal government reduce the cost of infrastructure with Federal tax incentives to this minority group – "farmers"?**