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March 20, 2020

The Honorable David Ige
Governor
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street, Executive Chambers
Honolulu, HI 96813

Aloha Governor Ige,

Everyone needs to eat.

Sometimes it takes a crisis to realize priorities and put the appropriate focus on basic necessities.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has designated food and agriculture as one of 16 critical infrastructure sectors; a sector considered so vital to our country that its incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on security, national economic security, national public health, and safety. This designation was made to help ease uncertainties, roadblocks, and potential farm failures in the face of COVID-19.

Across the U.S., "shelter-in-place" and the fear of spreading COVID-19 is threatening access to farm labor and disrupting food distribution and markets. This has already affected product availability in Hawai'i and could lead to long-term shortages if we are unable to keep the food supply chain intact.

Over the last several years, the public has become increasingly aware that over 85% of our food comes from outside the State. They know that Hawai'i has only several weeks of food to sustain its residents in case of a shipping or other distribution catastrophe. Many were shocked to be so dependent on food that comes from so far away, fearing that the day may come when a disaster empties our grocery store shelves. That day is here. Bare shelves are frightening, but vacant farms and ranches would be devastating.

Hawai'i cannot afford to sit by and let our local producers flounder while the people of this state go without. There can be no interruption in the agricultural process; immediate action is needed. Because of the closure of restaurants and schools, many local farmers have lost their customers and their cash flow. By the time our retail markets are completely devoid of food and other necessities, it may be too late to resurrect our farms.

Producers must be able to access capital to pay farmworkers and buy seeds and other inputs now. They must have access to water for clean irrigation and process water. They must have access to energy to power the equipment needed for agriculture production. They must have access to transportation systems to move their products. And finally, they must know that there are outlets for them to sell their produce, once it's harvested.



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We recognize that the State and counties are working hard to ensure operational continuity. As part of that effort, the undersigned farmer and rancher organizations urge the State government to swiftly follow and implement the federal directive to allow agricultural businesses to continue operating amid current and potential restrictions put in place to stem the spread of the virus. We need to ensure there is a continuous and uninterrupted supply of food to Hawai'i's people.

Our local farmers and ranchers are committed to grow and harvest the food we all depend on. We urge the State government to actively engage and work to ensure that farmers continue to have markets for their products. We ask you to declare farmers' markets and all agriculture-related operations to be critical and essential businesses.

Governor Ige, we respectfully request that if you choose to issue a "shelter-in-place", or other emergency declaration that would negatively impact Hawai'i's farmers and ranchers, that you provide appropriate exemptions for food distribution, including for sales of wholesale, retail, prepared food (drive-thru, carry-out, and delivery), farmers' markets, and *all* agricultural activities.

To assist local farmers and ranchers during this crisis, we request that you authorize emergency economic provisions to provide a safety net to prevent the loss of our local farms and ranches.

To assure continued agricultural production, we ask that you clarify that agricultural retail suppliers be regarded as essential components of the food system so that farmers can retain access to seed, fertilizer, chemical inputs and other essential components of farm production. In addition, all aspects of agricultural production (including nursery, sod and greenhouse operations) should be designated as essential parts of agriculture.

We further request that you suspend the filing of agricultural business tax returns and the payment of *all* business taxes to the State government for the duration of the pandemic.

We are respectfully reminding our leaders and lawmakers of agriculture's critical nature to humanity's well-being. Hawai'i farmers and ranchers want to feed you through this unsettling time. We need to support them so they can.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Randy Cabral".

Randy Cabral
President, Hawai'i Farm Bureau

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Unger".

Keith Unger
President, Hawai'i Cattlemen's Council