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## A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO TARO LANDS.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1           SECTION 1. Kalo (colocasia esculenta), the Hawaiian word  
2 for taro, is a culturally significant plant to the kanaka maoli,  
3 Hawaii's indigenous peoples and to the State. In 2008, the  
4 legislature recognized kalo's role in the State's history and  
5 well being by designating kalo as the state plant.

6           In 2008, the legislature also passed Act 211, which created  
7 the taro security and purity task force that directed the taro  
8 farmers, department of agriculture, department of land and  
9 natural resources, University of Hawaii, Hawaii farm bureau  
10 federation, and Onipa'a Na Hui kalo representatives to seek  
11 solutions to challenges facing taro, taro farmers, and taro  
12 markets for a period of two years. The task force was funded  
13 and administered by the office of Hawaiian affairs from 2008 to  
14 2010. This enabled the task force to meet consistently and  
15 gather input from taro growing communities on all islands over  
16 the last twelve months and develop recommendations to improve  
17 taro farmer conditions. The 2010 legislative report entitled:  
18 E ola hou ke kalo; ho'i hou ka 'aina le'ia, the taro lives;



1 abundance returns to the land, outlines the work of the taro  
2 task force and subsequent recommendations.

3       Currently, the State imports an estimated 1,800,000 pounds  
4 of taro annually. The taro security and purity task force found  
5 "no logical reason why we should continue to import any kind of  
6 taro to meet local needs." The problems articulated by taro  
7 farmers are multi-faceted: the key to expanding the capacity  
8 for taro self-sufficiency in Hawaii is access and affordability  
9 of taro lands. The task force found that the State retains  
10 numerous lands within its jurisdiction that were former taro  
11 lands or are capable of becoming wet or dry taro producing lands  
12 on all islands, many of which are prioritized for other uses.  
13 It also found that lease rates were inconsistent and in some  
14 cases unduly expensive due to the influence by the value of  
15 adjacent developed lands, therefore making the land unaffordable  
16 to existing or future taro farmers. The task force found that  
17 some agricultural leases, both public and private, were as low  
18 as \$30 per acre per year, but as high as \$2,000 per acre per  
19 year when they were adjacent to highly valued residential  
20 properties or conservation land. In general, taro farming lands  
21 appear to have higher lease rates among state agencies than  
22 leases for other agricultural uses. The high cost of leases



1 makes critical fallowing practices that improve soil health and  
2 reduce apple snail populations and fungal diseases in taro soils  
3 unaffordable.

4 Taro farming is a practice learned on-farm, through family,  
5 and by example. Lease criteria that require specific education  
6 levels or financial status prevent taro farmers from qualifying  
7 for leases, particularly among young farmers.

8 The purpose of this Act is to improve access to taro  
9 growing lands and opportunity for taro self-sufficiency by  
10 requiring the department of land and natural resources and  
11 department of agriculture to reevaluate their inventory of lands  
12 for potential taro-growing lands, develop more affordable and  
13 reasonable lease rent rates, establish accessible criteria for  
14 qualifying taro farmers, and, in partnership with the taro  
15 security and purity task force, facilitate the expansion of taro  
16 production and food self-sufficiency.

17 SECTION 2. The department of land and natural resources  
18 and department of agriculture, in conjunction with the taro  
19 security and purity task force, shall:

20 (1) Reevaluate agency land inventory for potential taro-  
21 growing lands, and using local knowledge of the  
22 location of historic dry and wet taro cultivated



- 1 areas, designate these lands for taro production use  
2 by January 1, 2012;
- 3 (2) Develop a consistent and affordable lease rent rate  
4 schedule specific to taro farmed lands by January 1,  
5 2012;
- 6 (3) Set a cap on lease rents for taro farms at no more  
7 than \$100 per acre, regardless of adjacent land  
8 values;
- 9 (4) Review existing qualifying criteria for farm leases  
10 and develop a consistent and accessible criteria for  
11 taro farmers to qualify for taro land leases by  
12 January 1, 2012; and
- 13 (5) Provide taro farmers, organizations, and individuals  
14 access to information by January 1, 2012, including:
- 15 (A) Taro land inventories;  
16 (B) Opportunities for leases of these lands; and  
17 (C) Qualifying criteria and costs for farm leases.

18 SECTION 3. The department of land and natural resources  
19 and department of agriculture shall submit a report to the  
20 legislature no later than twenty day prior to the 2012 regular  
21 session regarding the reclassification of taro lands,



1 adjustments to lease rents, and modifications to lease  
2 qualification criteria.

3 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2010.

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**Report Title:**

Agriculture; Affordable Taro Lands

**Description:**

Requires the department of land and natural resources and the department of agriculture to work with the taro security and purity task force to identify taro lands, adjust lease rents, and modify lease qualification criteria.

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