



Maui County

October 16, 2017

State Land Use Commission
P.O. Box 2359
Honolulu, Hawaii 96804

RE: DR17-60: Petition for Declaratory Order to Designate Important Agricultural Lands – Molokai, Hawaii

Chair Wong and Members of the Land Use Commission:

I am Warren Watanabe, Executive Director of Maui County Farm Bureau. We are a County Chapter of the Hawaii Farm Bureau, representing 200 farm families and organizations on the island. Our mission seeks to protect and increase the viability of farms and ranches while ensuring the social and environmental wellbeing of the island.

MCFB strongly supports Monsanto's voluntary application for designation of important agricultural lands on Molokai.

The Hawaii Statute providing the authority, standards and criteria for designation of Important Agricultural Lands was passed nearly 30 years after the Constitutional Mandate requiring such designation. It took many years due to concerns about takings and questions of whether designation would mean agriculture. A taskforce of diverse individuals ranging from farmers to environmental groups met for one year to propose the measure which became known as Act 183 SLH 2005. Experts from around the country were consulted. We looked at the Williamson Act in California to the Agricultural Lands Preservation protocols in New Jersey. American Farmland Trust, experts in agricultural land preservation were brought in for consultation. Ultimately, there was recognition that preservation of land does not equal preservation of agriculture which we believe is the intent of the Constitutional Mandate. The Article speaks not only to designation but for its' use as agriculture to increase the State's self sufficiency and sustainability. This understanding resulted in the Hawaii Important Agricultural Lands law – unique in the country as it is not based on payment for easements but rather encourages landowners to VOLUNTARILY DESIGNATE and receive incentives for investments in agricultural operations and infrastructure. The capped tax credits are miniscule compared to the land values that are being designated. The incentives was provided to avoid takings claims and the 50% cap as a further incentive for voluntary designations. There are over 100K acres designated to-date. Unlike easements large payments have not been made, yet all of the 100K acres are committed to agriculture.

The primary criterion for designation is the existence of an active farm. Monsanto's lands on Molokai meet this criterion and their operations are critical to the economic viability of agriculture on Molokai. The presence of the Monsanto operation provides a critical mass for agricultural economic activity, so vendors can provide for smaller farmers leveraging the purchases of a larger entity such as Monsanto.

Monsanto has been a leader in demonstrating stewardship practices, sharing the information with fellow farmers. In addition to corporate contributions, their employees volunteer and donate generously to the community. Agriculture on Monsanto lands serves as an economic base on the land. It is also a significant contributor to the maintenance of the Molokai Irrigation System, a critical source of water for Molokai Agriculture.

We commend Monsanto for stepping up with the VOLUNTARY designation of their lands on Molokai and respectfully request your strong support towards the approval of this declaratory ruling. Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on this important measure for the people of Molokai and the State of Hawaii. If there are any questions, please contact Warren Watanabe at 281 9716.