

NEWS RELEASE



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MEMBERS BEING SOUGHT FOR TASK FORCE ON KALO

HONOLULU – The Office of Hawaiian Affairs is seeking applicants to be members on a task force that will develop recommendations and programs to help protect kalo, a crop plant sacred to Native Hawaiians that is being decimated by alien diseases and insects.

Recently named Hawai‘i’s state plant, kalo is used to make poi, the staple of the traditional Hawaiian diet, and is considered to be the elder sibling of Native Hawaiians, according to their traditions. However, kalo production fell to just 4 million pounds harvested in 2007, a record low since statistics were first documented in 1946. This shortage has been blamed on a number of factors, including diseases and alien species, such as apple snails, as well as the lack of water and taro land.

Act 211, which was signed by Gov. Linda Lingle in July, calls for the creation of the Taro Security and Purity Task Force, which will be administered by OHA. The aim of the task force is to bring together the various kalo stakeholder groups, including farmers, Native Hawaiians and scientists, for the common goal of helping the plant once again thrive. The task force will attempt to find solutions to the problems facing the crop, while avoiding the divisive issue of genetic modification research.

The task force will build on the work conducted last year by the State Department of Agriculture, which began developing a taro security and purity research program by holding meetings throughout the state with taro farmers, Native Hawaiians and scientists.

The task force will include one representative from OHA; the state Department of Land and Natural Resources; the state Department of Agriculture; the University of Hawaii; the Hawaii

Farm Bureau Federation; 'Onipa'a Nā Hui Kalo, a statewide organization of kalo farmers; and a yet-to-be-selected botanical garden.

The task force will also include two kalo farmers from each of the following islands: Kauai, Oahu, Maui, Molokai and Hawaii. OHA is seeking applicants to fill these farmer seats on the task force.

Applicants must fulfill the following qualifications:

- 1) be a farmer actively growing kalo;
- 2) have at least three years of kalo farming experience;
- 3) be growing kalo on the island they seek to represent;
- 4) and be capable of participating in task force activities, including traveling to other islands to attend meetings.

As the administrator of the group, OHA will select the best qualified kalo farmer applicants to serve as representatives. In addition, OHA will cover the costs of holding the task force meetings, as well as member travel fees for kalo farmer representatives.

The deadline to send applications is September 15, 2008. Applications must be written and include the applicants' full name, address, a brief description of their fulfillment of the four qualifications, what they believe they will be able to contribute to the task force and a short list of what they believe are the most important issues facing kalo.

Please send applications to Sterling Wong of OHA's Native Rights, Land and Culture division by email to sterlingw@oha.org or by regular mail to 711 Kapiolani Blvd., Suite 500, Honolulu HI, 96813. For more information call 594-0248.