

**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
Governor

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
Lt. Governor



**SHARON HURD**  
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

**DEAN M. MATSUKAWA**  
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i  
**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
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**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD  
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2025  
2:00 PM  
CONFERENCE ROOM 308**

**HOUSE BILL NO. 773 HD1  
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE**

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 773 HD1 that appropriates funds for grant specialist positions to assist farmers and ranchers in meeting the requirements to receive grants offered by the United States Department of Agriculture State, counties or private entities. The Hawaii Department of Agriculture (Department) is in strong support of this bill.

The Department agrees that providing technical assistance to farmers and ranchers is key to connecting the funding to the intended beneficiaries. The application process can be complex, and the time needed to put together the grant package is a deterrent. Hawaii food production will be well-served by one or more grant specialists bringing their expertise to the farmer and ranchers to secure resources offered by federal, state, county and private sources.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our testimony.





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February 20, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

**TESTIMONY ON HB 773, HD1**  
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Conference Room 308 & Videoconference  
2:00 PM

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice-Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

I am Brian Miyamoto, Executive Director of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau (HFB). Organized since 1948, the HFB is comprised of 1,800 farm family members statewide and serves as Hawai'i's voice of agriculture to protect, advocate, and advance the social, economic, and educational interests of our diverse agricultural community.

**The Hawai'i Farm Bureau supports HB 773, HD1**, which appropriates funds to establish grant specialist positions within the Department of Agriculture.

The decrease in direct Federal appropriations for agriculture has resulted in an increased dependence on grants. Many federal programs have become competitive grant programs.

Hawai'i's farmers and ranchers are finding it difficult to secure the financial support necessary to build capacity. Grant writing for USDA, State, County, and other grants usually involves a very complex application process that can be difficult to navigate. This often deters farmers and ranchers from applying for grants. Well-trained and skilled grant specialists could assist farmers and ranchers in obtaining USDA and other grants by helping them apply for and fulfill their requirements.

Access to USDA and other grants can result in increased capacity, new business opportunities, increased employment opportunities and address Hawai'i's goals of increased self-sufficiency and sustainability.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.



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#### **Executive Officers**

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**Kit Okimoto**, Okimoto Corp., *Vice Chair*  
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**Lauren Zirbel**, HFIA, *Executive Director*  
**Paul Kosasa**, ABC Stores, *Advisor*  
**Derek Kurisu**, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*  
**Toby Taniguchi**, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*  
**Joe Carter**, Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii, *Advisor*  
**Eddie Asato**, Pint Size Hawaii, *Advisor*  
**Gary Okimoto**, Safeway, *Immediate Past Chair*

TO: Committee on Finance  
FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION  
Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

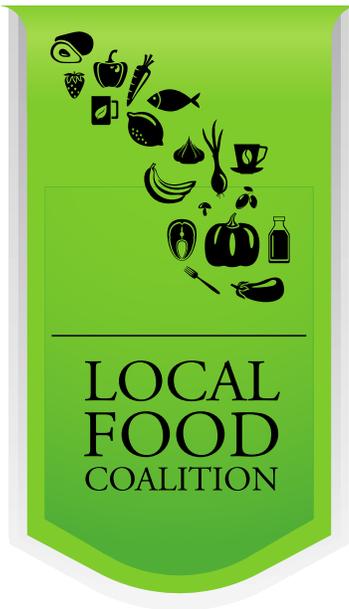
DATE: February 20, 2025

TIME: 2pm

RE: HB773 HD1 Relating to Agriculture  
Position: Support

The Hawaii Food Industry Association is comprised of two hundred member companies representing retailers, suppliers, producers, manufacturers and distributors of food and beverage related products in the State of Hawaii.

HFIA is in support of this measure. As the measure notes, “many of Hawaii’s 2 farmers and ranchers are finding difficulty in securing the 3 financial support necessary to build a thriving, vibrant 4 business.” Federal grants can be a vital funding source for those in the agricultural sector. However, successful grant writing can be time consuming and difficult and requires a specialized skill set. Establishing dedicated grant writing positions helps ensure that our local farmers and ranchers will have access to the Federal funding opportunities that were created to support them. Creating these positions will help draw Federal funds into our local agricultural sector and food systems which will circulate in the local economy. We encourage the committee to pass this measure and we thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Hawai'i Aquaculture & Aquaponics Association  
Hawai'i Cattlemen's Council  
Hawai'i Farm Bureau Federation  
Hawai'i Farmers' Union United  
Hawai'i Food Industry Association  
Hawai'i Food Manufacturers Association  
Kohala Center  
Land Use Research Foundation of Hawai'i  
Maui Farm to School Network (Maui F2SN)  
Ulupono Initiative  
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources - University of Hawai'i at Manoa

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
Thursday, February 20, 2025 – 2:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference  
**Agenda #3**

## **HB 773 HD1 – RELATING TO AGRICULTURE**

### **SUPPORT**

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

The Local Food Coalition **SUPPORTS** HB 773 HD1, which appropriates funds to establish grant specialist positions in meeting the requirements to receive grants offered by the United States Department of Agriculture, State, counties or private entities.

Federal grants are one way the state can increase funding for agriculture. Unfortunately, grant writing is a very complex and time-consuming process, which can be a deterrent to farmers and ranchers from applying for such grants.

Having grant specialists in the Department of Agriculture could help our local farmers and ranchers gain access to federal funding and other available resources that may be available to help them increase capacity and help the state reach its goal of increasing local food production and reducing our reliance on imports.

The Local Food Coalition is an organization comprised of farmers, ranchers, livestock producers, investors and other organizations working to provide Hawaii's food supply.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 773 HD1.



Email: [communications@ulupono.com](mailto:communications@ulupono.com)

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
Thursday, February 20, 2025 — 2:00 p.m.

**Ulupono Initiative strongly supports HB 773 HD 1, Relating to Agriculture.**

Dear Chair Yamashita and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mariah Yoshizu, and I am the Government Affairs Associate at Ulupono Initiative. We are a Hawai'i-focused impact investment firm that strives to improve the quality of life throughout the islands by helping our communities become more resilient and self-sufficient through locally produced food, renewable energy, clean transportation choices, and better management of freshwater resources.

**Ulupono strongly supports HB 773 HD 1**, which appropriates funds to establish grant specialist positions to assist farmers and ranchers in meeting the requirements to receive grants offered by the United States Department of Agriculture, State, counties, or private entities.

Ulupono supports the State's efforts to actively pursue grant opportunities that help local agriculturalists. Many federal programs are dedicated to aiding departments or agencies across the states that can apply for funding to support local initiatives. Establishing and funding positions within the DOA for this work is extremely timely, not only to secure new funding for local farmers and ranchers, but also to preserve existing grant funding amid current uncertainties at the federal level.

Based on a preliminary search of federal funding opportunities available in FY25, the DOA identified more than 20 distinct funding opportunities totaling more than \$22 million in potential awards. These range from agricultural innovation to water infrastructure to food systems development. The DOA is well positioned to secure significant federal resources, but only if equipped with sufficient staff capacity to pursue these opportunities, as many of these grants require complex applications with detailed project budgets, measurable outcomes, and coordination across agencies and stakeholders. Without this capacity, Hawai'i risks leaving millions in federal dollars on the table that could otherwise support critical investments in agricultural infrastructure, food security, and more. Even securing just a few of the larger grants like the \$5 million Regional Conservation Partnership Program or Regional Agricultural Promotion Program would justify the personnel costs with substantial and transformative return on investment.

*Investing in a Sustainable Hawai'i*



To further illustrate the substantial return on investment from agricultural grant writing, we offer an example from the private nonprofit sector: From 2014 to 2023, Ulupono provided funding for grant writers with organizations such as The Kohala Center, the O‘ahu Agriculture and Conservation Association, and the Hawai‘i Farm Bureau. These efforts brought in a total of approximately \$140 million, 100 times the full grant writing investment. Ulupono believes that the State should strongly consider general funding DOA grant writers as they will similarly prove well worth the investment and result in millions of dollars in federal funding to further support the State’s agricultural efforts.

We appreciate this committee’s effort to hear important measures that look to establish long-term support for our local farmers and ranchers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Mariah Yoshizu  
Government Affairs Associate

Attachment

# STRENGTHENING HDOA'S ABILITY TO ACCESS FEDERAL FUNDING

Funding grant writing staff within the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) is a valuable investment that can yield a high return and long-term benefits for the state. Not only are they essential for pursuing new funding but also for maintaining existing federal grants – particularly crucial given current uncertainties in the federal funding landscape – which makes it imperative to build this capacity as quickly as possible. Filling these positions also follows through on legislators' requests to maximize existing positions toward legislative intent.

## Budget Request

**Three grant writer positions to be dedicated to securing block and competitive federal grant programs.**

- HDOA manages approximately \$6 million in recurring annual grants. For FY2025, an additional \$22 million in new federal funding opportunities has been identified, bringing the total potential grant funding to \$28 million.
- **Examples of funding opportunities are:**
  - \$5 million - USDA Regional Agricultural Promotion Program
  - \$5 million - U.S. Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Storage Projects
  - \$1.82 million - USDA Local Food for Schools and Child Care Program
    - \$1.32 million for school food programs
    - \$496,000 for child care facilities
  - \$1.21 million - USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Program
  - \$1 million - USDA Regional Food Systems Partnerships
- These grants support diverse agricultural initiatives including innovation, water infrastructure improvements, and food systems development.

## Why Grant Writers?

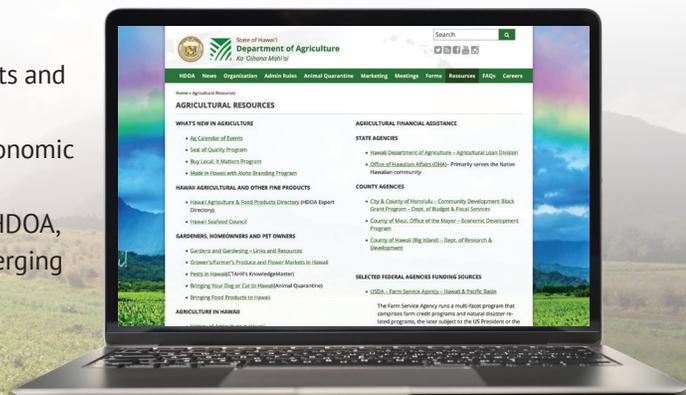
**This investment in personnel could result in a return on investment dozens of times over.**

**Skilled grant writers will help the State to:**

- Access federal funds by preparing competitive and compelling grant proposals that align with local farmer needs
- Identify and pursue grants that supplement and leverage existing State resources, maximizing the impact of HDOA's programs

**Federal grants will provide:**

- Additional means to support important projects and services without solely relying on State funds, especially in times of natural disasters and economic hardship
- A diversified source of long-term funding for HDOA, offering stability and flexibility to address emerging challenges or capitalize on new opportunities





## Did You Know That ...

Stimulus bills approved by Congress beginning in 2020 unleashed the largest flood of federal money into the U.S. economy. Roughly \$5 trillion went to households, mom-and-pop shops, restaurants, airlines, hospitals, local governments, schools, and other institutions around the country grappling with the blow inflicted by COVID-19. A number of large USDA grant programs were created. The HDOA needs grant writer support in order to go after these multi-million-dollar opportunities.

## Other Benefits for the State

**By having grant writers on HDOA's staff, the State will benefit from:**

- Grant writing is a specialized skill, and having dedicated grant writers allows other HDOA staff to focus on their core responsibilities leading to better use of resources and expertise.
- Aligned grant-seeking efforts with the HDOA's strategic goals and priorities ensures that all federal funding opportunities will support the agency's long-term objectives.
- Stronger partnership with Hawai'i's congressional delegation to better communicate the agricultural industry's needs.

**Funding Invested vs. Secured (\$s in Millions)**



## Return on Investment

**Grant writers provide a significant return on investment**

Investing in grant-writing capacity not only pays for itself but also brings in funds several times the initial investment.

- Ulupono Initiative invested \$1.4 million in grant writers over the past 10 years through organizations such as The Kohala Center, O'ahu Agriculture & Conservation Association, and Hawai'i Farm Bureau.
- Secured ~\$140 million for local agriculture (100x return on investment).
- This included unprecedented funding from the USDA.
  - \$40 million from the Climate-Smart Commodities program to help farmers fund climate-smart farming practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
  - \$30 million from the Regional Food Business Centers (RFBC) program to establish regional centers, which provide farmers with grants and connect them with federal programs.
  - \$3.2 million from the newly created USDA Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) program.



February 18, 2025

To: Chair Kyle Yamashita, Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi and the House Committee on Finance

Subject: **HB 773 HD1**, Relating to Agriculture

Aloha,

I am writing in **support** of **HB 773 HD1**, which appropriates funds for grant specialists to assist farmers and ranchers with meeting requirements for grant applications offered by USDA, state, county, and private entities. The amendment does not specify the number of FTE positions, nor specify an effective date. I ask the committee to allow at least 3 FTE positions to encourage collaboration between staff and balance workload. It is critical for these specialists to be trained and outreach to farming communities as soon as possible, especially with the recent cancellation of federal grants and uncertainty of future federal funding sources.

The grant application process is challenging for a number of reasons: confusing jargon and eligibility requirements, various deadlines for differing grants, and the time it takes to prepare and submit the application package. It takes dedicated effort to sort through all the available grants because it is difficult to know what is available, let alone applicable. This process is a significant yet necessary burden, especially for agricultural producers who face low profit margins and high costs, and rely on outside sources of funding to sustain their operation.

There is a huge opportunity to access millions of dollars in federal funding and support our local economy. Our agricultural producers play a critical role in our island communities and deserve dedicated support to understand grant opportunities, since funding will benefit us all through a more resilient food system.

I urge the committee to pass this measure. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this issue.

Mahalo,

Lea laea & the Food+ Policy Team

#fixourfoodsystem

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**The Food+ Policy internship** develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2025, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.

**HB-773-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 3:53:08 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support. Good grant specialists can be a great investment. But perhaps only temporary status so unproductive specialists can be easily excused.

**HB-773-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 6:02:33 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Annie Liu	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As an employee of USDA that works with farmers, ranchers, and private landowners to implement conservation practices, I know firsthand how time-intensive and complicated it is to apply to our programs. There are numerous requirements, confusing language, and technological skills that prevent local farmers and ranchers from accessing our funding. Each application can take hours of time. Yet, these funds are crucial to farmers who have low profit margins and often have to work outside jobs to supplement their income. Farmers are able to expand their business, and targeted funding programs allow farmers to be able to afford practices that have environmental benefits for our island's soil, water, and wildlife. Beyond the economic benefits, having dedicated grant specialists will make our valuable food producers feel supported, open doors to other resources by being connected with knowledgeable employees, and demonstrate the State's commitment to investing in a local food system.

There are hundreds of millions of dollars in grants and programs that are not accessed by local producers, and have the opportunity to be invested into Hawai'i. I see how much of a difference accessing federal funding can make, and I cherish the role I have in assisting Oahu's producers to access these funds. I hope more grant specialists will be hired to do the same. I urge the committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Annie

**HB-773-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/19/2025 9:44:40 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Chloe Amos	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Chloe Amos and I strongly support HB773. Hawai'i needs to be doing everything we can to support our farmers at this time--they are the lifeblood of our potential survival in a case of emergency or climate crisis. Farmers do not have the time to also become skilled grantwriters. Providing farmers with assistance in meeting grant requirements would be a huge support to the overall sustainability of our island economy and environmental sustainability. Please support HB773!

Thank you,

Chloe Amos