

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 AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2025
9:30 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 325**

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

Chair Kahaloa, Vice Chair Kusch and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 773 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 the 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.





Email: communications@ulupono.com

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS
Friday, February 7, 2025 — 9:30 a.m.

Ulupono Initiative strongly supports HB 773, Relating to Agriculture.

Dear Chair Kahaloa 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, 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.

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

Investing in a Sustainable Hawai'i



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?

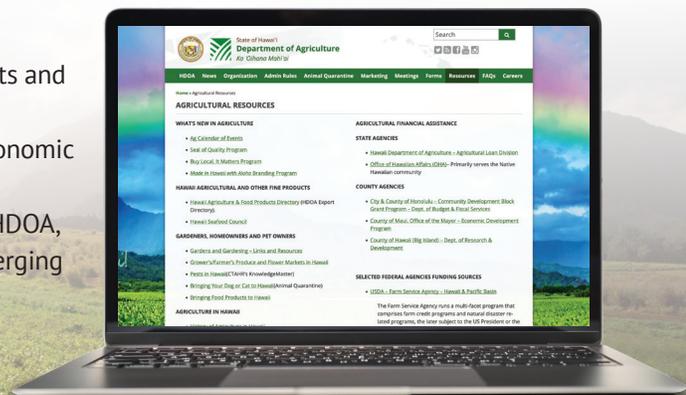
This investment in personnel could result in a return on investment dozens of times over.

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



STRENGTHENING HDOA'S ABILITY TO ACCESS FEDERAL FUNDING

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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.



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February 7, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

TESTIMONY ON HB 773
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Conference Room 325 & Videoconference
9:30 AM

Aloha Chair Kahaloa, Vice-Chair Kusch, 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, 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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Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, O'ahu

Natalie Urminska
Kaua'i

Aloha Chair Kahalōa, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the House Agriculture & Food Systems Committee,

The Hawai'i Farmers Union is a 501(c)(5) agricultural advocacy nonprofit representing a network of over 2,500 family farmers and their supporters across the Hawaiian Islands. **HFU supports HB773.**

HB773 seeks to allocate essential funds for the appointment of grant specialist positions, which will play a crucial role in facilitating farmers and ranchers in Hawaii to effectively navigate the often complex and time-consuming process of securing grants. These grants, offered by the United States Department of Agriculture, the State, counties, or private entities, are indispensable in supporting agricultural operations and enhancing food security and sustainability in the region. By equipping farmers and ranchers with dedicated specialists, this bill ensures that they can avail themselves of the full spectrum of financial support available, allowing them to focus more on their core agricultural activities.

Assistance from grant specialists will empower farmers to comply with varying application requirements, improve their chances of receiving grant funding, and optimize the use of these funds to boost productivity and innovation within the agricultural sector. It will also serve to bridge the information gap and make grant resources more accessible to smaller farming operations that might not have the capability to hire private consultants. By investing in these positions, HB773 supports the growth and resilience of local agriculture, fostering an environment where farmers can thrive and contribute significantly to Hawaii's economy and community well-being.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union



Hawaii Cattlemen's Council, Inc.

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

Rep. Kirstin Kahaloa, Chair
Rep. Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair

HB773
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Friday, February 7, 2025, 9:30 AM
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference

Chair Kahaloa, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **supports HB773** which 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.

Grant writing is often time-consuming and requires thorough knowledge of the process to be successful. While grant funds are available, this difficulty can be a deterrent to farmers and ranchers from applying for such grants. Grant specialists in the Department of Agriculture could help our local farmers and ranchers gain access to federal funding 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.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify on this measure. The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council (HCC) is the Statewide umbrella organization comprised of the four county-level Cattlemen's Associations. Our member ranchers represent over 60,000 head of beef cows; more than 75% of all the beef cows in the State. Ranchers are the stewards of over 750 thousand acres of land in Hawaii, or 20% of the State's total land mass. We represent the interests of Hawaii's cattle producers.

Nicole Galase
Hawaii Cattlemen's Council
Managing Director





February 6, 2025

To: Chair Kirstin Kahaloa, Vice Chair Matthias Kusch and the House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems

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

Aloha,

I am writing in **support** of **HB 773**, 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 grant application process, as many of us know, involves a hefty stack of paperwork, hours of reading through requirements, writing supporting documentation, and organizing records and reports. It is not only hard to understand the requirements when applying for grants, but takes dedicated time and effort to sort through all the available grants, and to even know what is available. 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.

With recent funding from the Inflation Reduction Act, numerous [Climate Smart Commodities](#) projects have become available. Funding programs through USDA, the state, and local nonprofits are also constantly being introduced with deadlines and requirements that are difficult to track. Now, more than ever, our agricultural producers need assistance to access these grant opportunities.

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

Mahalo,
Lea Iaea & the Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

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.

<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://www.hawaii.edu/news/2022/10/04/uh-leads-climate-smart-food-production-grant/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1738824601888311&usg=AOvVaw1eBWJw-yoQVEIye5sTCszK>

HB-773

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 2:46:20 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/7/2025 9:30:00 AM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Angelica Melone | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Chair Kahaloa, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee,

I support HB773, which allocates funds for grant specialist positions to assist farmers and ranchers in securing grants from USDA, state, counties, or private entities. Grant writing is often complex and time-consuming, and this can deter local producers from applying. Grant specialists in the Department of Agriculture would help them access federal funding to increase their capacity, aligning with Hawaii’s goals of boosting local food production and reducing reliance on imports.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify. I believe this measure is crucial for supporting local farmers and ranchers.