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Aloha Chair Kahaloe, 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. **HFUU supports HB912.**

Debt relief for farmers is an essential measure to ensure the sustainability and growth of Hawaii's agricultural sector. Farmers have already repaid more than the original bond amount, yet the burden of ongoing debt service fees continues to weigh heavily on them. Paying off the remaining \$4.5 million in bond debt will provide direct economic relief to farmers, enabling them to reinvest in their operations rather than making excessive payments on outdated debt. This financial reprieve can lead to enhanced productivity and innovation, ultimately benefiting both farmers and consumers alike.

Supporting this initiative will also result in lower costs for consumers. Currently, the high expenses associated with irrigation—necessary for maintaining crop yields and quality—are inevitably reflected in the price of locally grown food. By alleviating the financial pressure on farmers, the bill will help make nutritious, locally-produced food more accessible and affordable for the community. Furthermore, by reducing the economic strain on farmers, the bill plays a crucial role in keeping land in active agricultural production, thus preventing farm closures or the conversion of farmland to non-agricultural uses.

H.B. 781 offers a strategic and necessary investment in Hawaii's food system by improving irrigation system efficiency and enhancing water security for both Leeward and Windward farmers. By reducing water losses, this bill anticipates positive downstream impacts on stream restoration, native ecosystems, and community water users. It ensures that agricultural lands remain productive, supporting not only the farmers who steward them but also the broader ecological and food security interests of Hawaii. By addressing these irrigation challenges, the state strengthens its commitment to sustainability and self-sufficiency, benefiting future generations.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union



P.O. Box 253, Kunia, Hawai'i 96759
Phone: (808) 848-2074; Fax: (808) 848-1921
e-mail info@hfbf.org; www.hfbf.org

January 31, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

TESTIMONY ON HB 912
RELATING TO THE AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Conference Room 325 & Videoconference
10:00 AM

Aloha Chair Kahaloe, 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 912, which appropriates funds to offset the debt for the Waiahole Water System.

Since the demise of plantation operations across the islands, we have seen the erosion of irrigation systems. Ditches that carried water fell into disrepair, with significant leaks in the system and cracks in tunnels creating enough losses that there is no longer a significant flow of water. The Legislature continues to advocate for increased self-sufficiency and sustainability. Agriculture must play a key role in the process, and for there to be agriculture, water is essential.

The Waiahole Irrigation System was built about 100 years ago and continues to be a critical infrastructure system that provides water to thousands of acres of prime agricultural lands in central O'ahu. The central plains of O'ahu are one of the most highly productive and diversified agricultural regions in the State.

The State Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC), recognizing the system's importance to the State's future sustainability, purchased the Waiahole Irrigation in 1989. Supporting the bond debt service for the Waiahole Water System ensures its financial sustainability and reinforces the state's commitment to maintaining this essential resource for agricultural use.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our comments and for your continued support of Hawai'i's agricultural community.

KUNIA VILLAGE TITLE HOLDING CORPORATION
PO BOX 100
KUNIA, HI 96759
808 228 0272

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE
ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS**

on

HOUSE BILL 912

Relating to the Agribusiness Development Corporation

January 31, 2025

Chair Kahaloa and Members of the Committee:

My name is Stephanie Whalen. I am President of the Kunia Village Title Holding Corporation (KVTHC). I am testifying today on behalf of this entity. It consists of an agricultural housing and an agricultural business community. There are over 600 men, women and children residing here and/ or working in the 10 agricultural businesses or non-profits companies supporting agriculture. These are the people who help produce the fresh fruits and vegetables for your table.

KVTHC strongly supports House Bill 912 Relating to the Agribusiness Development Corporation.

This bill provides very thorough information about the system, its uniqueness and value to the farmers and the overall community. Such a system would certainly cost many millions more dollars to construct today. It also appears to be one of the more **costly irrigation systems for farmers**. The cost is approaching that of the electrically pumped system in this area. Unfortunately, the water pumped from the aquifer in this area has been contaminated by various parties and its continuing use for irrigation is uncertain.

Consequently, the users of this system feel it is appropriate and of value to the state to pay off this burdensome debt on the farmers in this region. The costs of about \$4.5M to pay off this debt will result in savings of over \$5.0M for the farmers over the remainder of this debt. As with all businesses farming costs are ultimately borne by the ultimate users. In this case those that eat here: you, me, everyone in Hawaii. AND, we are all aware of the significant increase in imported foods recently whether canned, packaged or fresh.

Paying off this debt as proposed in this bill for local farmers who have already paid an amount that more than covers the principal is certainly an action worth your most serious attention.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Hawaii's agricultural needs.



Hawaii Agriculture Research Center

94-340 Kunia Road, Waipahu, HI 96797

Ph: 808-621-1350/Fax: 808-621-1359

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

HOUSE BILL NO. 912

--RELATING TO THE AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Friday January 31, 2025

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

My name is Robbie Melton. I am Executive Director of the Hawaii Agriculture Research Center (HARC). I am testifying today on behalf of the center and our research and support staff.

HARC strongly supports House Bill 912 relating to the Agribusiness Development Center and the Waiahole Water System

HARC is a non-profit organization whose mission is to support agriculture in Hawaii through research and infrastructure preservation. HARC provides critical research to improve crop production, developing new crop varieties, disease resistance and higher productivity that will benefit Hawaii's producers. Our research outcomes are shared with local producers on new farming techniques and transfer new varieties of crops to strengthen their productivity and viability. The Kunia Experiment Station sits on 108 acres and currently has 43 active research projects and provides farm plots to eight UH Go Farm graduates and agricultural organizations.

HARC's Kunia experiment station relies on the Waiahole Irrigation System. It is the only source of agricultural water for HARC. The Board of Water Supply limited the use of potable water to domestic use on this parcel and where available to other agricultural operations in the area. Without water there can be no viable agricultural activity on this land as it receives very little rainfall.

As a user of this system, we feel it is appropriate and of value to the state to pay off this burdensome debt on the farmers in this region. The costs and savings of this action are well reported in the body of this proposed bill. HARC is a non-profit organization and does not have the financial means to support an alternative water system.

Paying off this debt as proposed in this bill will support local agricultural production and ease the financial burden of Hawaii's farmers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Hawaii's agricultural needs.



January 28, 2025

Representative Kirstin Kahaloa, Chair
Representative Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair
House Committee on Agriculture & Food Systems

**Support of HB 912, Relating to the Agribusiness Development Corporation
(Appropriates funds to offset the debt for the Waiahole Water System.)**

Friday, January 31, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.;
State Capitol, Conference Room 325, Via Videoconference

The Land Use Research Foundation of Hawaii (LURF) is a private, non-profit research and trade association whose members include major Hawaii landowners, developers, and utility companies. LURF's mission is to advocate for reasonable, rational, and equitable land use planning, legislation and regulations that encourage well-planned economic growth and development, while safeguarding Hawaii's significant natural and cultural resources, and public health and safety.

LURF appreciates the opportunity to express its **support of HB 912**, and of the various agricultural stakeholder groups who defend the goals of viable agricultural operations and the conservation and protection of agriculture, including important agricultural lands in Hawaii.

HB 912. The purpose of this bill is to appropriate funds to the agribusiness development corporation to offset the financial burden of reimbursement of debt service for the Waiahole Water System.

LURF's Position. Since large amounts of prime agricultural lands and irrigation systems became available for conversion to diversified agriculture due to the plantation closures in the 1990s, the State has had the opportunity to strengthen and expand Hawaii's diversified agriculture industry. Agricultural lands, however, require significant quantities of water to support and maintain productivity. To ensure that local agricultural producers may continue to receive a dependable supply of water for crops, as well as research and development operations, sufficient funding is necessary to improve, repair and maintain Hawaii's irrigation and water systems.

The Waiahole irrigation system, one of Hawaii's most important irrigation systems, is over a hundred years old, 23.5 miles long, and services thousands of acres of productive agricultural lands in central Oahu. The system is one of many irrigation systems throughout the State which are vital to Hawaii's agricultural industry.

Local farmers and ranchers who rely on irrigation systems to service their agricultural lands consider such resources critical to conduct their agricultural operations and to sustain their businesses. These agricultural stakeholders confirm that HB 912 will greatly assist by providing funding necessary to offset the financial burden of reimbursement of the debt service which was incurred by the agribusiness development corporation to procure and make improvements to the Waiahole Water System in order to protect a vital natural resource and to ensure the expansion of diversified agriculture in Hawaii. Such action is critical to support and promote the long-term betterment of the State's agricultural industry; promote the agricultural self-sufficiency of the State; and to protect water as an important resource.

For the above reasons, LURF **supports HB 912**, and respectfully urges your favorable consideration.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in support of this matter.



January 31, 2025

House Committee on Agriculture & Food Systems

Time: 10:00 am

Place: Conference Room 325

Testimony on HB 912

Relating to the Agribusiness Development Corporation

Position: Support

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Chair Kirstin Kahaloe and committee members:

Bayer U.S.
94-520 Kunia Road
P.O. Box 200
Kunia, HI 96759

My name is Alan Takemoto, Government Affairs manager for Bayer in Hawaii.

We are in support of HB 912 which appropriates funds to offset the debt for the Waiahole Water System.

The Waiahole Irrigation System (WIS) is one of the most important agricultural infrastructure the State has invested in on Oahu. The WIS covers over 5,000 acres of prime and productive agricultural lands that serves over a dozen farms in central Oahu.

The WIS is an aging system that was built in the early 1900's. It is a unique irrigation system that moves water by gravity through several siphons over 26 miles from the Koolau mountains to the central plains of Oahu. The State's purchase of the system in 1999 was one of the most important investments that assured farming will continue in the central plains of Oahu.

This bill will allow ADC to focus on it's users and keep agriculture viable in the future.

Thank you for allowing us to testify in support of this measure.

LARRY JEFTS FARMS, LLC
PO BOX 27
KUNIA, HAWAII 96759
(808) 688-2892

HB912, Relating to The Agribusiness Development Corporation
House AGR Hearing – 10:00 AM
Friday, January 31, 2025

Testimony By: Larry Jeffs
Position: Support

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

I am Larry Jeffs, owner and operator of Larry Jeffs Farms, LLC. We have more than 42 years of Hawaii farm experience on Molokai and Oahu. Our family farms grow about 1 million pounds weekly of import replacement produce. I am a volunteer director, serving as Chair of the West Oahu Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). I have also served as an officer of the Hawaii Farm Bureau for many years.

Consistent access to affordable water is vital; water is the lifeblood of my farms. Without such access, there would be no farms.

Funding to pay off the bond debt is a high priority for Central and Leeward Oahu agriculture, of which the Waiahole Water system provides irrigation water to 5,866 acres. Relief from the bond debt costs helps mitigate the cost of water to farmers.

During the days of plantation agriculture, plantations repaired and maintained irrigation systems, not only for their use, but these systems were often beneficial to surrounding farmers and, at times, residential areas. When plantations closed, irrigation systems fell into disrepair and still need repair.

Your favorable consideration of HB912 is appreciated. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.

HB-912

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 9:46:13 AM

Testimony for AGR on 1/31/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John R. Gordines	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

I support this bill for ADC water infrastructure of Waihole water system.
no water no food!!

January 31, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

TESTIMONY ON HB 912
RELATING TO THE AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Conference Room 325 & Videoconference
10:00 AM

Aloha Chair Kahaloe, Vice-Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee:

I support HB 912, which appropriates funds to offset the debt for the Waiahole Water System.

Since the demise of plantation operations across the islands, we have seen the erosion of irrigation systems. Ditches that carried water fell into disrepair, with significant leaks in the system and cracks in tunnels creating enough losses that there is no longer a significant flow of water. The Legislature continues to advocate for increased self-sufficiency and sustainability. Agriculture must play a key role in the process, and for there to be agriculture, water is essential.

The Waiahole Irrigation System was built about 100 years ago and continues to be a critical infrastructure system that provides water to thousands of acres of prime agricultural lands in central O'ahu. The central plains of O'ahu are one of the most highly productive and diversified agricultural regions in the State.

The State Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC), recognizing the system's importance to the State's future sustainability, purchased the Waiahole Irrigation in 1989. Supporting the bond debt service for the Waiahole Water System ensures its financial sustainability and reinforces the state's commitment to maintaining this essential resource for agricultural use.

As a small farmer on Kauai, I realize the importance of irrigation water not only for agriculture, but for fire fighting and maintaining vegetative cover in vulnerable areas. We farm in an area that was once planted in sugar and have experienced the loss of irrigation ground water recharge.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our comments and for your continued support of Hawai'i's agricultural community.

HB-912

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 3:45:27 PM

Testimony for AGR on 1/31/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Theresa M Thompson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB 912 RELATING TO THE AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION.

Mahalo,

Theresa Thompson

HB-912

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 9:47:45 AM

Testimony for AGR on 1/31/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Randy Cabral	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support

HB-912

Submitted on: 1/30/2025 9:48:01 AM

Testimony for AGR on 1/31/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
J Ashman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill.