

**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF PLANNING
& SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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Statement of
MARY ALICE EVANS, Director

before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER AND LAND

Monday, February 10, 2025

1:00 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 229

in consideration of

SB 1331

RELATING TO THE LAND STUDY BUREAU SOIL RATING SYSTEM.

Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Elefante, and Members of the Senate Committee on Water and Land, the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development (OPSD) **strongly supports** SB 1331, an Administration bill, which requires OPSD to update the soil data used in the Land Study Bureau (LSB) soil rating system and to establish a process for regularly updating the soil data in the system. The bill appropriates funds for the update process.

Pursuant to Act 189, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2022, OPSD conducted a study of the suitability of the LSB system and other soil classification systems used to regulate agricultural lands in the State. The Final Report of the study, recently submitted to the Legislature, found that the soil data used by the LSB system has not been updated since it was issued over 50 years ago. More information on the study findings and recommendations can be found in the Final Report posted at https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/op/lud/LUD%20website/SoilClassificationSystems&UseinRegulatingAgriculturalLandsStudy-FinalReport_12-2024ada.pdf.

The study found that the update of the soils data in the LSB system and establishment of a process for regularly incorporating the updated soils data in the LSB system would enhance the credibility of the soil rating system and increase its usefulness in guiding the regulation of agricultural lands statewide.

SB 1331 implements this important recommendation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



SHARON HURD
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

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TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON WATER AND LAND

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2025
1:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 229

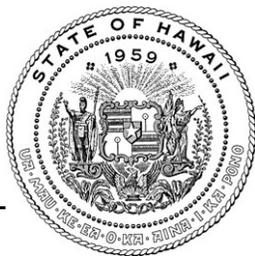
SENATE BILL NO. 1331
RELATING TO THE LAND STUDY BUREAU SOIL RATING SYSTEM.

Chair Inouye and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill No. 1331 that requires the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development (OPSD), in coordination with other agencies, to update the soil data used in the land study bureau soil rating system and create a mechanism for regular soil data updates. The Department of Agriculture (Department) supports this measure and looks forward to assisting OPSD over the next two years in completing this important task.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our testimony.





**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI
A HO'OMĀKA'IKĀ'I

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR

JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
DIRECTOR

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Statement of
JAMES KUNANE TOKIOKA
Director
Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism
before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER AND LAND

Monday, February, 10, 2025
1:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room # 229

In consideration of
SB 1331
RELATING TO THE LAND STUDY BUREAU SOIL RATING SYSTEM.

Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Elefante and members of the Committee. The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) supports SB 1331, an Administration bill, which requires the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development (OPSD) to update the soil data used in the Land Study Bureau soil rating system (LSB) and develop a process for incorporating soil data updates in the system. The bill appropriates funds for the update process.

The LSB system is a key guide to State and county land use regulation of agricultural lands. OPSD recently submitted the Final Report of a study of the suitability of the LSB system to the Legislature as required by Act 189, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2022. The Report can be found at <https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/annuals/2024/2024-opspd-soil-study-final.pdf>. The study found that the LSB soil data has not been updated since it was issued over 50 years ago. Incorporating the latest soil data in the soil rating system is critical to ensuring credibility and effectiveness of the soil rating system in regulating use of agricultural lands.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Water and Land
Monday, February 10, 2025 at 1:00 p.m.

By

Parwinder Grewal, Dean
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience

And

Michael Bruno, Provost
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 1331 – RELATING TO THE LAND STUDY BUREAU SOIL RATING SYSTEM

Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Elefante and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 1331 which requires the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development (OPSD), in coordination with other agencies, to update the soil data used in the land study bureau soil rating system and create a mechanism for regular soil data updates and appropriate funds.

We support the measure and respectfully offer an amendment to SECTION 3., Page 4, line 2 to correct the name of the college to university of Hawaii at Manoa college of tropical agriculture and human ~~resources~~ resilience (CTAHR). The renaming of the college was approved in October 2024 to better align CTAHR's name to its land-grant mission of improving the human condition and human use of natural resources through research, education and Cooperative Extension.

CTAHR stands ready to cooperate with and assist OPSD as they implement this important work.

We support SB 1331 with the suggested amendment. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.



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February 10, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WATER AND LAND

TESTIMONY ON SB 1331
RELATING TO THE LAND STUDY BUREAU SOIL RATING SYSTEM

Conference Room 229 & Videoconference
1:00 PM

Aloha Chair Inouye, Vice-Chair Elefante, 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 SB 1331, which requires the Office of Planning and Sustainable Development (OPSD) to update the Land Study Bureau (LSB) Soil Rating System with current data, establish a process for regular soil data updates, and create detailed digital soil maps to assist in the regulation of agricultural lands.

Hawai'i's soil classification system has not been comprehensively updated since its initial creation between 1965 and 1972. The system was designed during a time when plantation agriculture dominated Hawai'i's economy, primarily focusing on sugarcane and pineapple production. While this classification system has remained a key reference for state and county land use decisions, it does not reflect the diverse range of agricultural practices currently used in Hawai'i.

HFB recognizes that agriculture has evolved beyond traditional soil-based farming. Today, greenhouses, hydroponics, aquaculture, and aquaponics are viable agricultural practices that can thrive on lands classified as less productive. Some of Hawai'i's most successful floriculture and hydroponic operations are located on lands classified as C, D, or E, demonstrating that soil quality alone does not determine agricultural viability. Other factors such as climate, water availability, infrastructure, and market access play significant roles in determining land productivity.

By incorporating updated soil data from the United States Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service and developing digital soil maps, SB 1331 will provide farmers, landowners, and policymakers with more accurate tools to assess agricultural potential. Establishing a mechanism for regularly integrating new soil data will ensure that Hawai'i's agricultural land use policies remain relevant and aligned with national best practices.

While we support the intent of SB 1331, we encourage careful planning to ensure that the \$400,000 allocated for this initiative is used effectively. It is essential that farmers and stakeholders are actively engaged in this process to ensure that updates to the Land Study Bureau Soil Rating System reflect the realities of modern agriculture.

We also **recommend that the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience (CTAHR) at the University of Hawai'i and the Department of Agriculture (DOA) be formally included or consulted** in this process. Both agencies have extensive expertise in Hawai'i's agricultural conditions and soil science, and their involvement will ensure that the revised classification system is practical and beneficial for the agricultural community. Their research, field studies, and direct engagement with farmers can provide valuable insights to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of soil classification for agricultural land use planning.

Additionally, we recommend that the 24-month timeline for implementing these updates is structured to allow for meaningful collaboration and thorough assessment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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Aloha Chair Inouye, Vice Chair Elefante, and Members of the Senate Water and Land 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 SB1331.**

The [Soil Classification Systems and Use in Regulating Agricultural Lands Study Final Report \(DC174\)](#) notes that the misapplication of the outdated Land Study Bureau (LSB) soil rating system is contributing to the loss of productive agricultural lands in Hawai'i. Originally designed in the 1960s, using soil data from the 1930s, the LSB ratings were shaped by crop selection and irrigation practices at that time. This classification system has been applied to land use regulations for decades, locking in arbitrary distinctions that no longer reflect modern use or current soil science. As a result, lands that were temporarily used for non-irrigated crops—despite having fertile soils—were downgraded in classification, making them more vulnerable to rezoning for or conversion to non-agricultural uses. This approach has systematically eroded Hawai'i's agricultural land base and has hindered efforts to expand local food production.

A striking example documented in the OPSD study final report, is the case of lands in 'Ewa on O'ahu. In the 1972 LSB update a portion of land which was then irrigated for sugarcane, retained its 'A' rating and remains in agricultural use today as the Mililani Agricultural Park. In contrast, the adjacent area, which was planted in non-irrigated pineapple at the time, was downgraded to a 'D' rating despite having identical soil characteristics. This classification led to its eventual conversion into a 131-acre solar energy facility, significantly impacting agricultural use potential. The fact that historical crop and irrigation choices, rather than land productivity, determined the fate of these lands highlights the serious flaws in using the outdated LSB system as a regulatory tool. If this pattern continues, more viable farmlands will be lost, not because they are unsuitable for agriculture, but because of an antiquated classification system that fails to reflect current realities.

Updating the LSB soil rating system is critical to ensuring that Hawai'i's land use policies protect agricultural lands based on their true productivity and potential. A modernized system that integrates updated USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) soil data will create a more accurate and dynamic classification framework. Without these reforms, farmers will continue to face unnecessary barriers in accessing land, and the state's long-term food security goals will be undermined by avoidable losses of prime farmland.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.
Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union