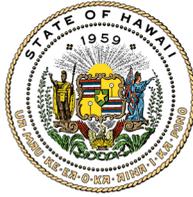


JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR | KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE  
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR | KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA 'O HAWAII'  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
KA 'OIHANA KUMUWAIWAI 'ĀINA

DIVISION OF FORESTRY AND WILDLIFE  
1151 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 325  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

DAWN N.S. CHANG  
CHAIRPERSON  
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LAND  
STATE PARKS

Testimony of  
DAWN N. S. CHANG  
Chairperson

Before the House Committee on  
JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Thursday, March 27, 2025  
2:00 PM

State Capitol, Conference Room 325 and Via Videoconference

In consideration of  
SENATE BILL 1582, HOUSE DRAFT 1  
RELATING TO THE COCONUT TREE

Senate Bill 1582, House Draft 1 recognizes the coconut palm as an official, sustainable staple food source in the State. **The Department of Land and Natural Resources (Department) supports this measure and offers the following comments.**

The niu (coconut palm) symbolizes resilience and sustainability in Hawaiian culture, deeply interwoven with traditional practices, language, and daily life. Historically, coconut trees provided nourishment, medicine, building materials, and fiber for rope and weaving. Recognizing niu as a sustainable staple food source is a step toward restoring and revitalizing its importance in our communities.

Hawai'i imports approximately 85–90% of its food, making it highly vulnerable to supply chain disruptions. Niu is a highly versatile and nutritious food source, offering coconut water, milk, meat, and oil—all of which can support local food production and reduce reliance on imported goods. Encouraging coconut cultivation will enhance food sovereignty and provide accessible, nutrient-rich options for island residents.

Niu is an iconic tree that contributes to Hawai'i's sense of place. As a drought- and salt-tolerant species, it plays a key role in coastal stabilization, erosion control, and carbon sequestration. By promoting the cultivation and protection of coconut trees, we reinforce the natural and cultural identity of Hawai'i while enhancing local sustainability efforts.

The Department's Division of Forestry and Wildlife has a Community Coconut Project within the Kaulunani Urban and Community Forestry Program. The Community Coconut Project is dedicated to fostering "niu as a relationship rooted in community and aloha 'āina" and focuses on extending 'ike niu (coconut knowledge) to rejuvenate Hawaiian coconut resources, including the Uluniu system, the Hawaiian niu gene banking practice, within our Hawai'i communities. The project aligns with this bill.

Finally, Hawai'i acknowledges the coconut palm as more than just a crop—it is a sacred and vital resource that sustains our land, people, and cultural identity. This bill aligns with goals for food security, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

**SB-1582-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/25/2025 6:17:57 PM

Testimony for JHA on 3/27/2025 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Indrajit Gunasekara	Niu Now/Uluniu	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha,

I'd like to deliver a verbal testimony on zoom to support this bill.

We recognize coconut as a vital Indigenous source of food, tool of cultural revolution and key resource on ecological conservation!



March 26 2025

To: Chair David Tarnas, Vice Chair Mahina Poepoe, and the House Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs

Subject: SB1582, Relating to The Coconut Tree

Aloha,

I am submitting testimony in **support** of **SB1582 HD1** that recognizes the coconut palm as an official, sustainable staple food source and that niu is **naturally, culturally and historically significant to Hawai'i**.

[Niu is currently known as an “ornamental tree” and is considered to be a liability in Hawai'i.](#) This status forces our coconut palms to no longer be recognized as a food source yet be an exotic symbol to attract tourists.

Niu plays a huge part in Hawaii – it connects people to one another through a food source, aids in ecosystem, Planetary, nutrition, and human health, and exhibits global indigenous values and principles. Hence, Niu is known as “the tree of life.”

[Niu is renowned for its rich nutritional value.](#) Niu contributes to heart health, muscle health, cognitive functions, digestive health, regulating blood sugar, provides probiotics, and is packed with vitamins that support immunity. Niu is used as an alternative for dietary restrictions and to enhance current or other dietary preferences. Niu is also sustainable in utilizing our natural resources such as land and water. Niu utilizes land use with efficiency as its natural habitat is within diverse tropical ecosystems. Coconut cultivation requires less water compared to other food production methods.

As our global population is expected to reach 10 billion people by 2050 and we continue to develop dietary patterns that balance nutrition and sustainability for the health of our Planet, it is imperative that we find plant based food sources that are versatile, nutritious, and diverse.

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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.

<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/15/13/9937>

<https://pubs.acs.org/doi/full/10.1021/acs.jafc.3c09838>



In conclusion, if this bill is coupled with sustainable practices in niu agriculture or processing for coconut as a sustainable staple food source (i.e. prevention of expansion into protected and sensitive ecosystems, safe working conditions), this can ensure viability and vitality of this measure.

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

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<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/15/13/9937>  
<https://pubs.acs.org/doi/full/10.1021/acs.jafc.3c09838>

**SB-1582-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/26/2025 10:34:41 AM

Testimony for JHA on 3/27/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire	Ohana Unity Party & Kingdom Of The Hawaiian Islands	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Subject: A Coconut Revolution Unleashed – Elevate S.B. No. 1582 to Epic Heights!

Dear Illustrious Hawaii State Senators and Coconut Crusaders,

Aloha from the heart of paradise! I stand before you, ablaze with passion, to herald Senate Bill No. 1582, "Relating to the Coconut Tree," a dazzling proclamation that crowns the coconut palm—our majestic niu—as the titan of Hawaii’s natural wonders. This bill is a love letter to our islands’ soul, a bold stride toward food security, cultural reverence, and economic stardom, and I’m here to sprinkle some extra magic on it—because why settle for greatness when we can soar to grandeur?

The coconut palm, *cocos nucifera*, isn’t just a tree—it’s a living legend, a Polynesian pioneer that’s been whispering tales of resilience for millennia. From its life-giving water to its luscious meat, from its sturdy trunks to its whispering fronds, this marvel has cradled our ancestors and can catapult us into a sustainable future. S.B. No. 1582’s recognition of niu as a culturally significant plant and staple food source is a triumph, but let’s crank up the volume and make it a symphony! Here’s my electrifying vision to amplify this bill:

1. Crown the Coconut King with a Food Fiesta: Beyond recognition, let’s ignite a statewide Niu Renaissance! Amend the bill to launch a Coconut Cultivation and Consumption Campaign, rallying farmers, chefs, and communities to harvest every drop, shred, and husk. Picture coconut festivals where the air hums with the crack of shells and the sizzle of innovation—because niu isn’t just sustenance, it’s a celebration!
2. Unleash a Coconut Culinary Explosion: Infuse some zest by tasking the Department of Agriculture (or a spirited UH partnership) with crafting and sharing recipes that make niu the star of every plate. Feast your senses on these tantalizing treats:
  - Niu Nectar Bliss: Fresh coconut water spiked with pineapple and a hint of mint—a tropical elixir to quench the soul!
  - Coconut Loco Moco: Silky coconut meat gravy drenching a juicy patty, rice, and a fried egg—comfort food with an island twist!
  - Niu Husk BBQ Bites: Smoky, shredded coconut meat wrapped in its own husk, grilled to perfection—a sustainable snack with swagger! These recipes, blasted through public campaigns, could turn every kitchen into a niu shrine!

3. Tap the Coconut's Hidden Powers (Wink, Wink): Let's dig deeper—way deeper. Amend the bill to fund research into niu's nutritional wizardry—its hydration heroics, vitamin verve, and mineral might. And here's the kicker: whispers from ancient lore hint that coconut's magic might even perk up the bedroom blues (yes, ED could meet its match!). With science as our surfboard, we'll ride the wave to prove niu as a superfood, a cultural icon, and maybe even a flirty fix—all while ensuring it's safe for our ohana.

This isn't just a bill—it's a battle cry for self-sufficiency, a hula of heritage, and a rocket boost for our economy! The coconut palm thrives in our sun-kissed tropics, begging to be more than scenery—let's make it a cash crop, a food fortress, and a cultural crown jewel. Formal recognition is the spark; now let's fan it into a wildfire of opportunity—supporting local farmers, birthing new industries, and weaving niu into the fabric of our food systems and public health.

I beseech you, noble senators, to lace these vibrant threads into S.B. No. 1582 before it dances into law. You've laid the foundation—now let's build a coconut empire! To our partners at UH and beyond, I say: grab this torch and run with it—let's show the world that Hawaii doesn't just grow trees, we grow legends. The niu stands tall as our symbol of resilience—let's make it our sustenance, our story, and our swagger.

Mahalo nui loa for your fierce dedication to our islands' spirit. With these enhancements, S.B. No. 1582 could ripple across the globe—a tale of triumph told over coconut cups raised high. I'm itching to brainstorm more—let's make niu the naughtiest, niftiest gift Hawaii ever gave itself!

With Aloha and Coconut-Fueled Fervor,

Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire, HRM

Ohana Unity Party, Chairman

[www.Ohanaunityparty.com](http://www.Ohanaunityparty.com)

Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, H.I.



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Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the House Judiciary & Hawaiian Affairs 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 SB1582.**

The designation of the coconut palm as an official, sustainable staple food source in Hawaii aligns with a longstanding recognition of its importance in both cultural and agricultural contexts. Historically brought by Polynesian voyagers to the islands, the coconut palm has served as a versatile resource, supporting communities with its diverse applications. This bill honors such traditions while addressing our need for sustainable and ethical agricultural practices. By acknowledging the coconut palm's role, we reinforce our commitment to preserving cultural heritage and embracing environmentally sustainable practices that can meet contemporary challenges.

Beyond its cultural significance, the coconut palm can offer substantial economic and environmental benefits. Focusing on this plant can enhance Hawaii's food security and encourage the development of a wide array of coconut-based products including oils, beverages, and organic fertilizers. This, in turn, can stimulate innovation and create job opportunities across various sectors, from farming to product development and distribution. Moreover, the adaptability of the coconut palm to diverse climatic conditions makes it a robust option in the face of changing environmental dynamics, contributing greatly to the diversification and resilience of Hawaii's agricultural outputs. Embracing the coconut palm not only supports our local economy but also positions Hawaii as a leader in sustainable agricultural practices, illustrating how traditional wisdom can integrate with modern demands to foster sustainable and thriving communities.

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](mailto:info@hfbf.org); [www.hfbf.org](http://www.hfbf.org)

March 27, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY & HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

**TESTIMONY ON SB 1582, HD1**  
RELATING TO THE COCONUT TREE

Conference Room 325 & Videoconference  
2:00 PM

Aloha Chair Tarnas, Vice-Chair Poepoe, 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 1582, HD1**, which recognizes the coconut palm as a sustainable staple food source in Hawai'i. Coconut palms have long played a significant role in Hawaiian culture, agriculture, and food security, providing a wide range of edible and utilitarian products. By formally recognizing the coconut palm as a staple food source, this bill supports local farmers, encourages agricultural development, and promotes greater food self-sufficiency in the state.

Coconut production has the potential to contribute to Hawai'i's agricultural economy by creating new market opportunities for coconut-based products, including coconut water, oil, flour, and other value-added goods. The recognition of the coconut palm as a food source can also enhance its use in public health initiatives, food assistance programs, and sustainable agriculture policies.

However, while this bill highlights the importance of coconut as a food crop, the greatest threat to coconut palms in Hawai'i today is the coconut rhinoceros beetle (CRB). Since its detection in 2013, the CRB has rapidly spread, causing extensive damage to coconut and other palm species. The beetle burrows into the crowns of trees, weakening them, increasing their susceptibility to disease, and ultimately leading to tree death. If not controlled, CRB infestations will significantly impact coconut production, landscape aesthetics, and Hawai'i's overall ecosystem.

To fully realize the benefits of SB 1582, HD1, we strongly encourage additional investments in biosecurity funding and CRB eradication efforts. Without a coordinated and well-funded response, the continued spread of the beetle could devastate Hawai'i's coconut industry before it has the opportunity to expand. Strengthening pest management programs, enhancing monitoring and trapping efforts, and investing in biological control methods are essential steps to protecting Hawai'i's coconut palms.

We urge the committee to pass SB 1582, HD1 and to consider further support for biosecurity efforts to ensure that coconut remains a viable and sustainable food source for Hawai'i.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

**SB-1582-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/25/2025 10:50:21 PM

Testimony for JHA on 3/27/2025 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
James K. Rzonca	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill

**SB-1582-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/25/2025 11:51:35 PM

Testimony for JHA on 3/27/2025 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
M. Leilani DeMello	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

KĀKO‘O PIHA au i kēia pila! It’s about time that the niu is recognized as more than just an ornamental plant. Our kūpuna used every part of this tree and it should be this way for generations to come. Also please consider protecting our precious ulu niu from invasive species.

Mahalo,

M. Leilani DeMello

‘Ōla‘a, Puna, Hawai‘i