

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

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
Lt. Governor



**SHARON HURD**  
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

**MORRIS M. ATTA**  
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i  
**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**  
KA 'OIHANA MAHI'AI  
1428 South King Street  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96814-2512  
Phone: (808) 973-9600 FAX: (808) 973-9613

**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD**  
**CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS**

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2023**  
**2:20 P.M.**  
**CONFERENCE ROOM 312 AND VIDEO CONFERENCING**

**HOUSE BILL NO. 275**  
**RELATING TO TARO**

Chairperson Gates and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 275. This bill appropriates funds to the Department of Agriculture (Department) to provide grants to Hawaii farming groups to be dispersed to taro farmers. The Department supports this measure and offers the following comments.

The Department respectfully requests deleting the language attributing the finding to the Department on page 2, lines 5 to 7, since it has not published nor issued any statement to that effect. On page 2, lines 19 to 21, the measure mis-states the annual reported production averages for taro as four million tons. The Department estimates that production averages are approximately four million pounds, and our latest statistics point to almost five million pounds in 2021. Additionally, current data suggests that imported taro (fresh, chilled, frozen, or dried) in 2021 amounted to only 334,000 pounds. In 2019, pre-pandemic, a total of 454,262 pounds of taro were imported. Taro imports are unlikely to exceed local production in the near future.



On page 4, the Department recommends a tighter standard in Section 2. Under Section 2 (b), lines 8 to 9, the Department respectfully suggests the Legislature adopts a definition for qualified applicant. Qualified applicant could include farmers cultivating taro plants, taro corm, leaf, and taro huli. Likewise, the qualified farmers could include limited liability companies, S-corporations, partnerships, sole proprietorships, non-profit organizations, and agricultural cooperatives that meet necessary insurance requirements.

Additionally, the Department respectfully recommends that language in Section 2 (b) (1) be deleted since money spent or costs incurred in the past favor existing taro farmers but may preclude new, younger farmers from accessing proposed funding. Finally, the Department recommends that qualified applicants seeking grant funding be required to submit a plan for increasing or commencing their taro production, which may include activities such as lo'i improvements to enable sustainable cultivations, construction or improvements of washing and packing shed to comply with food safety requirements, leasing of farm equipment, and purchase of farming materials.

Thank you for your consideration on this measure.



**TESTIMONY OF  
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA  
THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE, 2023**

---

**ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:**  
H.B. NO. 275, RELATING TO TARO.

**BEFORE THE:**  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

**DATE:** Monday, February 13, 2023      **TIME:** 2:20 p.m.

**LOCATION:** State Capitol, Room 312

**TESTIFIER(S):** Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or  
Jodi K. Yi or Bryan C. Yee, Deputy Attorneys General

---

Chair Gates and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments regarding this bill.

This bill would appropriate money and establish within the Department of Agriculture a grant program to assist taro farmers. The purpose of the grants is to assist farmers in meeting the costs of cultivating taro for consumption. (Page 4, lines 5-7).

The grant program would be subject to article VII, section 4, of the Constitution of the State of Hawaii, which provides, "[n]o grant of public money or property shall be made except pursuant to standards provided by law." This bill does not appear to contain sufficient standards for grants of public money. Therefore, we recommend that this bill be amended to insert appropriate standards. Examples of existing statutes that provide standards for agencies to issue grants are found in part II of chapter 9 and sections 10-17, 210D-11, and 383-128, Hawaii Revised Statutes. Additionally, we have attached draft standards to this testimony as a sample to work from and we are happy to work with you on developing more specific standards.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

**POSSIBLE STANDARDS FOR THE GRANTS IN THIS BILL**

- (1) Any grant shall be used exclusively for the purposes of this program.
- (2) The applicant shall indicate capability to properly use the grant for costs that were incurred cultivating taro for consumption, provided that no grant shall be given unless money has already been spent by the applicant toward producing taro for consumption.
- (3) The applicant shall comply with all applicable federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, creed, sex, age, sexual orientation, disability, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law.
- (4) The grant shall not be used for purposes of entertainment or perquisites.
- (5) The applicant shall comply with other requirements as the department may prescribe.
- (6) All activities undertaken with funds received shall comply with all applicable federal, state, and county statutes and ordinances.
- (7) The applicant shall indemnify and save harmless the State of Hawaii and its officers, agents, and employees from and against any and all claims arising out of or resulting from activities carried out or projects undertaken with funds provided hereunder, and procure sufficient insurance to provide this indemnification if requested to do so by the department.
- (8) The applicant shall agree to make available to the department all records the applicant may have relating to the grant, to allow state agencies to monitor the applicant's compliance with this section.



STATE OF HAWAII  
HAWAII CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION & ADAPTATION  
COMMISSION  
POST OFFICE BOX 621  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96809

**Co-Chairs:**  
Chair, DLNR  
Director, OPSD

**Commissioners:**  
Chair, Senate AEN  
Chair, Senate WTL  
Chair, House EEP  
Chair, House WAL  
Chairperson, HTA  
Chairperson, DOA  
CEO, OHA  
Chairperson, DHHL  
Director, DBEDT  
Director, DOT  
Director, DOH  
Chairperson, DOE  
Director, C+C DPP  
Director, Maui DP  
Director, Hawai'i DP  
Director, Kaua'i DP  
The Adjutant General  
Manager, CZM

**Testimony of  
Leah Laramée  
Coordinator, Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission**

**Before the House Committee on  
AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS**

**Monday, February 13, 2023  
2:20 PM**

**State Capitol, Via Videoconference, Conference Room 312**

**In support of  
HOUSE BILL 275  
RELATING TO TARO**

House Bill 275 appropriates funds to the department of agriculture to provide grants to Hawai'i farming groups to be disbursed to taro farmers. **The Hawai'i Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission (Commission) supports this measure.**

The Commission's working paper *Nature-Based Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Change in Hawai'i* recognizes that Climate impacts to agriculture, fisheries, and food system infrastructure have steadily increased over the last 10 years and are projected to increase in severity over this century. Hawai'i, must prepare for more frequent and severe climate-induced shocks, disruption of critical supply chains and fisheries, increased food insecurity, and the catastrophic loss of life, livelihoods, property and infrastructure.

Simultaneously, the post-plantation agricultural economy of Hawai'i remains largely oriented toward external markets, with a diversified agriculture sector and regional food economy limited by a range of social, economic and political obstacles. Sustainably-managed agricultural systems can play a critical role in enhancing local food supplies, increasing resilience and adaptive capacity to climate change, and protecting Hawai'i's coral reefs ecosystems.

There are a number of models of sustainable food systems in Hawai'i, including approaches that incorporate indigenous management strategies, that can help to build resilience, and support biodiversity and ecosystem services. Recent research suggests that indigenous agroecosystems including lo'i systems supported large populations of Native Hawaiians pre-European contact, and that many of the areas that these systems likely occupied are still viable today. By contrast, Hawai'i's legacy of plantation agriculture has left many of the most highly productive soils in the state in a degraded condition. There are, however, many producers interested in reversing this

trend. Climate-smart agricultural management choices support soil health over time which provides beneficial outcomes for air and water quality, human health, groundwater recharge, nearshore ecosystem resilience, increased drought tolerance of crops and plants, reduced impacts of flooding, increased crop and livestock productivity, and overall ecosystem resilience.

With 41% of Hawai'i's agricultural lands currently unfarmed, there is a huge opportunity to lower the state's food importation rates while mitigating climate change and protecting native ecosystems and cultural/traditional practices. Locally-produced agriculture is a vital part of our economy. Combining cultural wisdom with new scientific methods, sustainable food systems can reduce carbon emissions and improve crop yields. Providing support and funding for taro farmers supports these efforts.

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



**HB275**  
**RELATING TO TARO**  
House Committee on Agriculture & Food Systems

February 13, 2023

2:20 PM

Room 312

---

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) offers its **SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENTS** for HB275, which would establish a grant program to assist kalo farmers in their kalo operations. **OHA asks that the Legislature also require the State of Hawai'i Department of Agriculture, in its adoption of rules for this program, to also take into special consideration the inequities and disparities faced by "socially disadvantaged farmers in Hawai'i," like Native Hawaiian mahi'ai (farmers), and their unique funding needs.**

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers (SDFR) "as those belonging to groups that have been subject to racial, ethnic, or gender prejudice."<sup>1</sup> The USDA has affirmed that Native Hawaiians are recognized under the SDFR characterization<sup>2</sup> and a number of financial support instruments exist through the USDA for SDFRs.<sup>3</sup> While this distinction and the needs of those within this designation exist at the federal level, the State of Hawai'i has yet to adopt the necessary policies and mechanisms to address inequities and disparities faced by socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers, like Native Hawaiian mahi'ai. **As the principal public agency in the State responsible for the performance, development, and coordination of programs and activities relating to Native Hawaiians, OHA asks this legislature to ensure that Native Hawaiian farmers and ranchers are provided equitable farm assistance opportunities, such as the grants proposed through this measure.**

OHA appreciates this opportunity to offer its support with amendments on this measure. Mahalo nui loa.

---

<sup>1</sup> USDA Economic Research Service, Socially Disadvantaged, Beginning, Limited Resource, and Female Farmers and Ranchers, available at <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/farm-economy/socially-disadvantaged-beginning-limited-resource-and-female-farmers-and-ranchers/#:~:text=The%20USDA%20defines%20socially%20disadvantaged,and%20Asian%20or%20Pacific%20I slander.>

<sup>2</sup> USDA Farm Service Agency, Minority and Women Farmers and Ranchers, available at <https://www.fsa.usda.gov/programs-and-services/farm-loan-programs/minority-and-women-farmers-and-ranchers/index>.

<sup>3</sup> USDA Farm Service Agency, Loans for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers Fact Sheet 2019, available at [https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2019/sda\\_loans-fact\\_sheet-aug\\_2019.pdf](https://www.fsa.usda.gov/Assets/USDA-FSA-Public/usdfiles/FactSheets/2019/sda_loans-fact_sheet-aug_2019.pdf).



**House Committee on Agriculture & Food Systems**

**Hawai'i Alliance for Progressive Action (HAPA) Supports: HB275**

Monday, February 13, 2023 2:20 p.m. Conference Room 312

Aloha Chair Gates, Vice Chair Kahaloa and Members of the Committee,

We support HB275 which appropriates funds to the department of agriculture to provide grants to Hawai'i farming groups to be disbursed to taro farmers.

HB275 is a critical and necessary step towards supporting native traditional food ways, farming and food security for Hawai'i. We need to do everything we can to support expansion of farming and particularly the cultivation of taro (kalo) which is so culturally significant and is such an important part of our landscape, history, food security and community.

We believe this measure is a great way to support a native cultural practice and Hawai'i's staple food. Supporting taro farmers will also help to keep native Hawaiian traditional and customary cultural practices & its vital agricultural knowledge alive.

Kalo is a valued landscape and is recognized as the State Plant. Kalo farmers need and deserve support to ensure taro farming continues to grow and expand into the future. This measure helps to incentivize farmers to grow taro, one of the healthiest staple starch foods available.

HB275 will create economic incentives for taro farmers' and could reduce the cost of poi for local families. In doing so, this measure could help make taro more widely accessible and enable Hawaiian families to reconnect with this culturally important food source.

Please support HB275.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anne Frederick', is written in a cursive style.

Anne Frederick  
Executive Director





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)

February 13, 2023

HEARING BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

**TESTIMONY ON HB 275**  
RELATING TO TARO

Conference Room 312 & Videoconference  
2:20 PM

Aloha Chair Gates, Vice-Chair Kahaloa, 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 275**, which appropriates funds to the department of agriculture to provide grants to Hawaii farming groups to be disbursed to taro farmers.

The Hawai'i Farm Bureau recognizes taro's importance in Hawai'i's cultural identity and role in local food security. This measure is aimed to assist taro farmers in their efforts to increase their production and viability. We support this effort to improve the taro farmer's ability to not only sustain themselves but also to expand their long-term success.

HFB supports any initiative that reduces the cost of production so that locally produced goods can compete with imported products, strengthening our local economy.

Hawai'i Farm Bureau Policy states: "State tax and monetary policies should be designed to encourage private initiative to help stabilize farm economics in the State of Hawai'i, to promote employment and economic growth, and to distribute the tax burden equitably. Further such policy should be used by the state, when appropriate, to encourage agricultural growth and expansion."

HFB supports HB 275, which is an investment in Hawai'i's taro farmers.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of this measure.



# Food+ Policy Internship 2023

[food@purplemaia.org](mailto:food@purplemaia.org)

February 12, 2023

To: Chair Gates, Vice Chair Kahaloa, and the House Committee and Agriculture and Food Systems

Subject: **HB275**, Relating to Taro

Food+ Policy strongly supports HB275 and the grant program for taro farmers it would create.

Taro is a very sustainable crop and staple starch that has been grown in Hawai'i for thousands of years, so it's very conducive to living in harmony with the resources of Hawai'i. However, two million pounds of taro is currently shipped in to meet basic demand for the State of Hawai'i.

This tells us that more taro needs to be grown in Hawai'i nei. Growing more taro will allow taro to be more affordable like it once was so Native Hawaiians can eat taro and their traditional dishes more regularly. By engaging in their culture by working taro lands, making traditional dishes of poi, kulolo, luau, and laulau, Native Hawaiians can reconnect more easily with their culture by eating these foods regularly instead of only on special occasions.

We humbly ask for the support of passing HB275.

Mahalo,  
Kelsey Amos & 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 2023, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students from throughout the UH 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.

**Officers**

Kaipo Kekona  
State President

Anabella Bruch  
Vice-President

Maureen Datta  
Secretary

Reba Lopez  
Treasurer

**Chapter Presidents**

Madeline Ross  
Kohala, Hawai'i

Odysseus Yacalis  
East Hawai'i

Puna, Hawai'i

Andrea Drayer  
Ka'ū, Hawai'i

Chantal Chung  
Kona, Hawai'i

Fawn Helekahi-Burns  
Hana, Maui

Reba Lopez  
Haleakala, Maui

Kaiea Medeiros  
Mauna Kahalawai,  
Maui

Kaipo Kekona  
Lahaina, Maui

Rufina Kaauwai  
Molokai

Negus Manna  
Lāna'i

Brynn Foster  
North Shore, O'ahu

Christian Zuckerman  
Wai'anae, O'ahu

Ted Radovich  
Waimanalo, O'ahu

Vincent Kimura  
Honolulu, O'ahu

Ray Maki  
Kauai



Aloha Chair Gates, Vice Chair Kahaloa, and Members of the House Agriculture & Food Systems Committee,

The Hawaii Farmers Union United (HFUU) 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 HB275.**

Taro farming is an essential part of Hawaii's culture and history, and the funds allocated in this bill will help secure the industry for future generations.

The funds from HB275 Taro will provide taro farmers with grants that can be used to purchase equipment or materials needed for farming, as well as to make infrastructure improvements that will lead to greater production capacity. Additionally, these funds will provide resources and education opportunities to farmers that may be spread too thin to access otherwise. By helping ensure the future of taro farming in Hawaii, the Hawaii Farmers Union United strongly and fully supports HB275.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Kaipo Kekona, President HFUU/HFUF

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kaipo S.K. Kekona".

**HB-275**

Submitted on: 2/10/2023 6:46:02 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/13/2023 2:20:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Dana Keawe          | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

Support

**HB-275**

Submitted on: 2/12/2023 12:53:39 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/13/2023 2:20:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Kaiea Medeiros      | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

Kalo is equal to life. Specifically here in Hawai'i. We need financial support and grant every opportunity for our Kalo farmers to thrive. When our Kalo farmers thrive we as a community thrive. To make meaningful steps towards food security Kalo farmers and Kalo production will be the pioneers and leaders of this effort.

**HB-275**

Submitted on: 2/12/2023 2:31:28 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/13/2023 2:20:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| penny levin         | Individual          | Comments                  | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

I support the intent of this measure (SB782). As a taro farmer, I offer the following comments. Grants should not be for past debt. There are also state and federal funds to assist with crop loss in the face of flooding and other natural disasters (although we recognize it never covers total loss). Grants are a different animal and should have clear purpose.

If we want to ensure there will be taro farms long into the future and taro farmers taking over from those who are entering retirement years (the majority of commercial taro farmers at this time), we need to focus on supporting a younger generation of taro farmers to succeed. Having a couple three years under your belt as a taro farmer is only one of a number of indicators that someone will stick with it in the long run.

Some of the biggest challenges they will have are things like the cost of leases, insurance, health insurance, installing feral animal fencing, fuel, irrigation pipes, poi making machines, the cost of a regular booth at a farmers market, cost or access to machinery, etc. For dryland taro farmers the cost of irrigating fields can also be excessive.

I would recommend that the HDOA draw upon the knowledge of the Taro Security and Purity (see the 2010 Report to the Legislature) and knowledgeable members of the taro farming community in developing such a program. In addition, I would draw your attention to SB1500 which calls upon DLNR and DOA to re-evaluate their lease rules to make taro lands more accessible and affordable to growers, a critical first step in this process.

Mahalo

Penny Levin

**HB-275**

Submitted on: 2/12/2023 7:36:51 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/13/2023 2:20:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Will Caron          | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

Please support HB275.

**HB-275**

Submitted on: 2/13/2023 5:34:46 AM

Testimony for AGR on 2/13/2023 2:20:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Ann Sullivan        | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha, Chair Gates, Vice Chair Kahalaloa, and Members of the Committee,

I SUPPORT the measure to appropriate funds to the Dept of Agriculture to provide grants to Hawai'i's farming groups to be disbursed to taro farmers.

I feel we need to do more to support our taro farmers here in Hawai'i. Taro or kalo is a highly nutritious food that has been a main staple food across Hawai'i and much of the Pacific. There is a cultural connection and kuleana to kalo. As we examine ways for Hawai'i to have food sustainability and not depend on import, one important way is funding the farmers who are already vested in the practice.

I support the measure to provide grants to local farmers and farming groups to continue the cultivation of kalo for sale and distribution to local households and eateries..

Mahalo, Ann Sullivan



**HB-275**

Submitted on: 2/13/2023 10:47:50 AM

Testimony for AGR on 2/13/2023 2:20:00 PM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Nanea Lo            | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Hello,

HB275 is a critical and necessary step towards supporting native traditional food ways, farming and food security for Hawai‘i. We need to do everything we can to support expansion of farming and particularly the cultivation of taro (kalo) which is so culturally significant and such an important part of our landscape, history, food security and community.

HB275 will create economic incentives for taro farmers’ and could reduce the cost of poi for local families. In doing so, this measure could help make taro more widely accessible and enable Hawaiian families to reconnect with this culturally important food source– while building up our own food security here in Hawai‘i.

Please support SB275.

Thank you for your consideration,

Nanea Lo, Mō‘ili‘ili