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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO TARO.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1           SECTION 1. The legislature finds that Hawaii imports  
2 approximately eighty-five per cent of its food and is considered  
3 highly vulnerable to food shortage events. Climate change  
4 significantly increases this vulnerability with sea level rise  
5 and intensified weather patterns in the Pacific, such as  
6 droughts, hurricanes, and floods. In 2016, the governor pledged  
7 to double food production in Hawaii by 2030 at the International  
8 Union for Conservation of Nature World Conservation Congress, as  
9 part of Hawaii's commitments to the world and the State and in  
10 order to begin to address this heavy reliance on imports.

11           The legislature further finds that small farms on ten acres  
12 or less in Hawaii produce a significant portion of locally-grown  
13 and locally-consumed food on each island. The small farm sector  
14 of agriculture is growing, yet the 2017 census of agriculture  
15 reported that the average small-scale farmer in Hawaii made less  
16 than \$40,000 per year, with losses of almost \$10,000 annually  
17 due to the high costs of farming, including land and water. To



1 accomplish the State's 2030 goal for local food production,  
2 there is an urgent need to better support small farmers,  
3 including through small economic incentives to build a larger  
4 market.

5 The legislature additionally finds that taro is a  
6 hypoallergenic complex carbohydrate that plays a critical role  
7 in the health of families, particularly Native Hawaiians. Taro  
8 is one of Hawaii's highest yielding staple starch food crops,  
9 producing ten thousand and twenty thousand pounds per acre per  
10 annum under wet and dry cultivation, respectively; however, taro  
11 is severely underproduced in the State. The 2017 census of  
12 agriculture reported two hundred seven farms and four hundred  
13 ninety-five acres of taro in wetland and dryland production. An  
14 estimated two hundred to three hundred additional acres are  
15 unreported or in subsistence taro cultivation. Annual reported  
16 production averages four million tons; however, taro imports are  
17 estimated to soon exceed local production.

18 The legislature also finds that loi kalo, or wetland taro  
19 systems, are additionally recognized for their potential to  
20 mitigate other impacts of climate change by functioning as  
21 riparian buffers and sediment retention basins. Root



1 vegetables, such as taro, can often survive hurricanes or flood  
2 events and can be harvested to address immediate food shortages  
3 where the capacity to store and cook food is strained.

4 The legislature further finds that, in its report to the  
5 2010 legislature, the taro security and purity task force made  
6 several recommendations to make taro farming affordable,  
7 including improving access to land, water, mentoring, and  
8 economic incentives. The legislature recognizes the critical  
9 importance of protecting and perpetuating the traditional  
10 practice of taro farming as part of Hawaii's cultural identity  
11 and finds that there is compelling public interest for providing  
12 funding to taro farmers in Hawaii to continue the traditional  
13 practice of taro farming in the State.

14 The purpose of this Act is to appropriate funds to the  
15 department of agriculture to provide grants to Hawaii farming  
16 groups to be disbursed to taro farmers.

17 SECTION 2. Chapter 141, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
18 amended by adding a new section to part I to be appropriately  
19 designated and to read as follows:

20 "§141- Grant program; taro farmers. (a) There is  
21 established in the department of agriculture a grant program to



1 assist taro farmers in meeting the costs of cultivating taro for  
2 consumption.

3 (b) The program shall provide grants to qualified  
4 applicants with the following terms and conditions:

5 (1) The applicant shall submit to the department a  
6 substantive plan for increasing taro production,  
7 including activities in which the applicant intends to  
8 engage in with granted funds; and

9 (2) The total amount of a grant to any one applicant shall  
10 not exceed \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

11 (c) The department shall adopt rules to carry out the  
12 purposes of the grant program. The grant applications shall be  
13 reviewed and approved by an administrative staff member of the  
14 department.

15 "Qualified applicant" means a farmer cultivating taro  
16 plants, taro corm, leaf, and taro huli and includes a limited  
17 liability company, partnership, sole proprietorship, nonprofit  
18 organization, and agricultural cooperative that meet the  
19 necessary insurance requirements."

20 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general  
21 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ or so



1 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2023-2024 and  
2 the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal  
3 year 2024-2025 for the department of agriculture to provide  
4 grants under the grant program established pursuant to section 2  
5 of this Act.

6 The sums appropriated shall be expended by the department  
7 of agriculture for the purposes of this Act.

8 SECTION 4. New statutory material is underscored.

9 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2023.



**Report Title:**

Department of Agriculture; Taro Farmers; Grants; Appropriation

**Description:**

Appropriates funds to the Department of Agriculture to provide grants to Hawaii farming groups to be disbursed to taro farmers.  
(SD1)

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