

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



SHARON HURD
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
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 & FOOD SYSTEMS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2025
9:30 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 325

HOUSE BILL NO. 498
RELATING TO THE AGRICULTURAL CRIMES

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

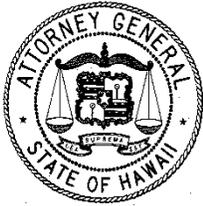
Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill No. 498 that establishes the Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council, expands the duties of the Department of Agriculture to collaborate with and support the Council, authorizes the Council to withdraw and deposit moneys, revenues, and fines into and out of the Animal Industry Special Fund and appropriates funds. The Department of Agriculture (Department) supports this bill and offers comments.

The Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council, established within the Department, will align the work of the council to support the Agricultural Enforcement Program established within Department of Law Enforcement (DLE) to address and resolve the shared challenges of resource limitations and enforcement capabilities, data collection, identification and mitigation of criminality, providing of education and awareness and restoration of public trust in law enforcement to adequately prosecute agricultural crimes.

The Department respectfully requests consideration for one special fund for the withdrawal and deposit of moneys, revenues and fines from the Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council and the Agricultural Enforcement Program, established by HB 501 to be the agricultural enforcement special fund. This would require revision to Page 17 Line 15 to Page 19 Line 2 to rename Section 142-3.5 so as keep the animal industry special fund specific to the work of the animal industry.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.





**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2025**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

H.B. NO. 498, RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL CRIMES.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

DATE: Wednesday, January 29, 2025 **TIME:** 9:30 a.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 325

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or Kelcie K. Nagata or
Christopher J.I. Leong, Deputy Attorneys General

Chair Kahaloa and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments.

The purpose of this bill is to establish the Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council within the Department of Agriculture. The Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council will be responsible for developing agricultural crime prevention, problem solving, and crime control recommendations and programs.

We note that the proposed section -2(b)(1) to (5) (page 5, lines 10 to 16) lists enumerated ex officio members that will serve on the council but does not expressly allow designees to represent those positions. For example, while the Chairperson of the Board of Agriculture and the Attorney General are named as members, their designated deputies or representatives are not permitted to serve in their place. To provide for greater flexibility, we recommend that page 5, lines 10-16, be amended as follows:

"(b) The council shall be placed within the department for administrative purposes only and shall comprise:

- (1) The chairperson of the board of agriculture[;] or the chairperson's designee;
- (2) The attorney general[;] or the attorney general's designee;
- (3) The prosecuting attorney of each county[;] or each prosecuting attorney's designee;

- (4) The director of law enforcement[;] or the director's designee;
- (5) The chief of police of each county[;] or each chief's designee."

Additionally, the proposed section -2(c) requires the council members to serve for four-year terms. This may cause confusion for ex officio members of the council. To clarify this, the first sentence on page 6, line 8, may be amended as follows:

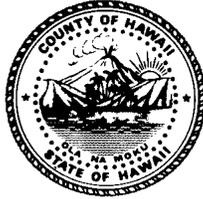
"(c) [~~The members~~] Members appointed by the governor pursuant to paragraphs (6), (7), and (8) shall serve four-year terms."

In the proposed section -4, beginning at page 10, line 6, the bill requires the Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council to "appoint and commission one or more investigators to investigate agricultural crimes." Page 10, lines 7-8. However, the bill does not explicitly require or authorize the council to investigate and enforce violations of "agricultural crimes." To clarify the council's responsibilities and ensure it has the necessary authority, we recommend adding a provision explicitly authorizing the council to investigate and enforce such violations. Additionally, the bill does not define the term "agricultural crimes," leaving ambiguity regarding the scope of enforcement. Clearly outlining the investigator's authority is essential for ensuring effective law enforcement.

Furthermore, section -4 lacks procedural guidelines for how an investigator would enforce applicable laws. For instance, section 142-29, Hawaii Revised Statutes, authorizes law enforcement officers and Department of Agriculture employees to enforce chapter 142 through citation and summons. Similarly, section 199-4(b) allows enforcement officers of the Department of Land and Natural Resources' Division of Conservation and Resources Enforcement to "immediately take the person arrested to a police station or before a district judge . . . [or] issue the person a summons or citation."

Given these gaps, if the legislature's intent is to create an attached agency similar to the Department of Land and Natural Resources Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement, then it may be effective to conform the bill to wording similar to chapter 199, HRS. We would be happy to assist in the drafting of appropriate provisions. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.
Mayor



Benson Medina
Director

Dennis Lin
Deputy Director

County of Hawai'i

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

25 Aupuni Street, Room 1301 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720-4252
(808) 961-8366 • Fax (808) 935-1205
E-mail: chresdev@co.hawaii.hi.us

January 28, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2025

9:30 AM

CONFERENCE ROOM 325

TESTIMONY ON HB 498 RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL CRIMES

Aloha Chair Kahaloha, Vice Chair Kusch, and members of the committee:

I am Benson Medina, Director of the Department of Research and Development, County of Hawai'i. One of the agricultural objectives of this department is to "support research, development, control, and education that improves agricultural production, quality, resilience, and producer viability or reduces the impact of pests or disease on agricultural crops, livestock, forests, or the community."

The County of Hawai'i **supports HB 498**, relating to agricultural crimes.

Hawai'i County is committed to expanding its production of local produce to feed our residents and tourists. The recent pandemic revealed that our food supply is susceptible to disruptions and puts all of us at risk.

One of the major challenges for our producers to expand production and for new producers to establish their farm is mitigating the risk of agricultural theft. Producers are often threatened by trespassers and thieves, and they do not receive enough support from the local authorities. This threat to life and income has caused potential and established producers to leave the industry.

A strong state-wide plan to address the issue of agricultural crimes is needed to strengthen the enforcement of trespass and agricultural theft incidents. A state-wide council to share methodologies and strategies will help local and state enforcement agencies to implement programs to reduce criminal activities.

January 28, 2024

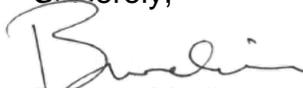
Page 2

Funding investigators to add to the Department of Law Enforcement and the local community police force will send a strong message to the criminals and local producers that trespassing on agricultural lands and agricultural theft will be seriously reckoned with.

A strong enforcement program will help the producers to continue their livelihood with the confidence that the incidents of trespass/theft will be reduced over time. This will encourage other potential producers to enter the agricultural industry and for established producers to consider expanding their operations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our input on this measure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Benson Medina". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Benson Medina
Director



Hawaii Cattlemen's Council, Inc.

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEM

Rep. Kirstin Kahaloa, Chair

Rep. Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair

HB498

RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL CRIMES

Wednesday, January 29, 2025, 9:30AM
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference

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

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **supports HB498** which establishes the Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council. Expands the duties of the Department of Agriculture to collaborate with and support the Council, authorizes the Council to withdraw and deposit moneys, revenues, and fines into and out of the Animal Industry Special Fund, and appropriates funds.

Agricultural crimes is a not a new issue – but it is getting more pervasive and more dangerous. So dangerous that we lost a young rancher to illegal trespassing and poaching in 2024. This incident was an incredibly unfortunate incident that we need to keep from happening again. Without the threat of a penalty, ag crimes will continue to flourish, to the detriment of our food producers. There needs to be a clear way for ranchers and farmers to report crimes, and an effective way to prosecute the crime.

Currently, agricultural crimes is not getting the dedicated attention it needs. Reporting of crimes is low, successful prosecution is limited, and criminals have no reason to be deterred from committing the crimes. Creating the Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council will bring together the expert stakeholders who can bring practical solutions to deterring crimes. This dedicated council is needed to help protect the safety of our farmers and ranchers who are so important to producing local food.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify on this measure. The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council (HCC) is the Statewide umbrella organization comprised of the four county-level Cattlemen's Associations. Our member ranchers represent over 60,000 head of beef cows; more than 75% of all the beef cows in the State. Ranchers are the stewards of over 750 thousand acres of land in Hawaii, or 20% of the State's total land mass. We represent the interests of Hawaii's cattle producers.

Nicole Galase
Hawaii Cattlemen's Council
Managing Director





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 29, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

TESTIMONY ON HB 498
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL CRIMES

Conference Room 325 & Videoconference
9:30 AM

Aloha Chair Kahaloa, 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 498, which establishes the Hawai'i Agricultural Crimes Council and expands the duties of the Department of Agriculture to collaborate with and support the Council.

Agricultural crime is a persistent problem facing agriculture. Weather, drought, pests, weeds, disease, unstable markets, transportation, labor issues, and a changing climate all contribute to uncertainty for farmers and ranchers. Few businesses face such challenges, yet we are charged with producing food, feed, fiber, fuel, and flowers for the 99% of non-farmers. Add in the constant threat and impacts of trespass, theft, and vandalism, and it's a wonder farms and ranches remain viable.

Sadly, agricultural crime is a growing trend in Hawai'i. Farmers and ranchers are often victims of those looking for easy targets. Despite our efforts to install cameras, form community ag watch groups, and patrol our farms, these criminals know that being caught and prosecuted is unlikely. Our police departments are trying to help but don't have the staffing and resources to be everywhere at all times.

In recent years, not only crops and livestock have been stolen, but also tractors, trucks, farm equipment, and tools. Too often, a farmer or rancher has sweated, worried, and worked to the bone to produce a crop or raise livestock, only to wake up one morning to find that an opportunistic criminal has helped themselves to the harvest. Farmers and ranchers are fed up with this activity and deserve better. We understand that law enforcement resources are often prioritized for public health and safety. Is a farmer's and his family's health, safety, and livelihood any less important? We think not.

HFB believes a Hawai'i Agricultural Crimes Council would create a formal platform for collaboration between the Department of Agriculture, law enforcement agencies, and agricultural stakeholders. The Council can facilitate the sharing of information, strategies, and resources to improve the prevention, investigation, and prosecution of agricultural crimes.

HB 496 represents a critical investment in protecting Hawai'i's agricultural community from the increasing threats of agricultural crimes. By creating the Hawai'i Agricultural Crimes Council and expanding the role of the Department of Agriculture, this measure fosters collaboration, strengthens enforcement, and enhances the safety and security of Hawai'i's farmers and ranchers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important subject.



Officers

Kaipo Kekona
State President

Anabella Bruch
Vice-President

Maureen Datta
Secretary

Reba Lopez
Treasurer

Aloha Chair Kahaloe, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the House Agriculture & Food Systems Committee,

Chapter Presidents

Clarence Baber
Kohala, Hawai'i

Tony Vera
East Hawai'i

Puna, Hawai'i

Andrea Drayer
Ka'u, Hawai'i

Maureen Datta
Kona, Hawai'i

Fawn Helekahi-Burns
Hāna, Maui

Mason Scharer
Haleakalā, Maui

Kaiea Medeiros
Mauna Kahālāwai,
Maui

Kaipo Kekona
Lahaina, Maui

Kilia Avelino-Purdy
Molokai

Negus Manna
Lāna'i

India Clark
North Shore, O'ahu

Christian Zuckerman
Wai'anae, O'ahu

Ted Radovich
Waimānalo, O'ahu

Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, O'ahu

Natalie Urminska
Kaua'i

The Hawaii 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 HB498.**

Establishing the Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council will create a dedicated body to coordinate efforts to combat theft and vandalism targeting agricultural operations. This collaborative approach underlines the importance of a concerted effort among various stakeholders, including the Department of Agriculture, to ensure the safety and sustainability of Hawaii's agricultural lands.

The financial provisions outlined in HB498 are essential for the effective operation of the Council. By authorizing the Council to manage moneys, revenues, and fines through the Animal Industry Special Fund, the bill ensures that there are dedicated resources available to tackle these crimes effectively. Appropriating funds for this initiative is a proactive measure that will provide the necessary support for enforcement activities, public awareness campaigns, and other critical functions of the Council. This legislation is vital for preserving the productivity and economic viability of local farms, which are integral to the state's food security and overall community well-being.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Kaipo Kekona, President HFUU/HFUF

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/27/2025 5:47:26 PM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keal Pontin	North shore livestock	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As the largest full finish beef operation on Oahu I strongly support this bill. It's already hard enough to be in this industry as is we constantly have to protect what little we have. We need all the help we can get if Hawai'i is going to have any type of food security.



Testimony Presented Before the House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems

January 29th, 2025 at 9:30am

RE: HB 498 Relating to the Agricultural Crimes – In Support

Aloha Chair Kahaloa, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Ed Schultz, and I strongly support HB 498, which addresses the alarming rise of agricultural theft and vandalism in our State. These crimes cause significant financial losses and endanger the safety of farmers, ranchers, and their communities.

Hawaiian Host Group (HHG) is the largest buyer of locally grown macadamia nuts and a major ag landowner in South Kona. As farmers ourselves, we have experienced theft on our macadamia nut farm, leading to financial strain, disrupted work, and delayed harvests. In the past year, HHG's operations at Kapua Orchards have been disrupted by stolen crops, equipment, fuel, and illegal hunting, all of which hinder reinvestment in Hawaii's agriculture.

We fully support the local macadamia industry and believe there is tremendous potential for growth; however, our team is constantly being distracted by agricultural-related theft. Strengthening penalties for agricultural trespassing and prioritizing enforcement are essential to protect our farms, families, and livelihoods. We fully support this bill and urge the legislature to do the same.

Thank you for considering this testimony.

Aloha,

Ed Schultz
President & CEO
Hawaiian Host Group

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 2:27:28 PM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sara Moore	KEALIA RANCH	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

YOUR SUPPORT OF THIS BILL IS CRITICAL TO Establishing the Hawai‘i Agricultural Crimes Council and to expanding the duties of the Department of Agriculture to collaborate with and support the Council.

Ag crimes are real and hurt us all. There need to be better methods of control and procecution.

Creating the Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council will bring together the expert stakeholders who can bring practical solutions to deterring crimes. This dedicated council is needed to help protect the safety of our farmers and ranchers who are so important to producing local food.

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 2:49:06 PM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rod Scheaffer	Hawaiian Host Group	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony Presented Before the House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems

January 29th, 2025 at 9:30am

RE: HB498 Relating to the Department of Law Enforcement – In Support

Aloha Chair Kahaloa, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Rod Scheaffer, and I am writing to express my staunch support for HB 501, which seeks to address the alarming rise in agricultural theft and vandalism in our State. These crimes not only inflict significant financial losses but also jeopardize the safety of farmers, ranchers, and their communities.

As farmers ourselves, we have experienced widespread theft on our macadamia nut farm in South Kona. These crimes have caused financial strain and created an environment of uncertainty and fear. Agricultural theft and vandalism are estimated to exceed \$14 million annually, though the true scale is likely underreported due to the challenges rural locations pose for timely law enforcement responses. Staffing shortages and competing priorities further hinder the ability to address these crimes effectively. When reporting burglary and trespassing the police are very disheartened by the lack of prosecution of these crimes due to them being misdemeanor offenses.

Strengthening penalties for agricultural trespassing and prioritizing the prevention and prosecution of these crimes are vital steps to protect the future of Hawaii agriculture. We fully support this bill and respectfully ask the legislature to do the same to safeguard our farms, families, and livelihoods.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and for considering this testimony.

Mahalo,

Rod Scheaffer
Senior Manager, Agricultural Operations
Hawaiian Host Group

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/26/2025 7:24:08 AM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
cheryl hendrickson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Farmer housing in Hawaii is needed to address the affordable housing crisis and support the state's agricultural workforce. The stability of the agricultural workforce is important for food security in Hawaii. The stability of farmer housing is critical to growing Hawaii's local food security. Given the complexity of navigating state and county regulations, a working group is a first step to identifying how to navigate viable solutions. Please support SB498.

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/27/2025 1:42:58 PM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lu Ann Mahiki Lankford-Faborito	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Absolutely as a victim of livestock & equipment theft on Molokai.

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/27/2025 7:38:05 PM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
McKenzie Wildey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support the establishment of the Hawai'i Agricultural Crimes Council.

Current lack of punishment for ag crimes emboldens thieves and trespassers, as they have little fear for repercussion. Unchecked incidents of theft and trespass increase the risk for violence.

Farming and ranching profit margins are already so low that theft can take a major toll on producers. Stolen ag products can be sold for cheaper at local markets, undercutting producers even further.

Mahalo.

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 4:25:28 AM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Alex Franco	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support HB498.

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 5:15:33 AM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Woody Child	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB498.

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 7:18:43 AM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stanley Cypriano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

HB498 - Relating to Agricultural Crimes

Written Testimony

Support

My name is Stan Cypriano and I am the owner of Nienie Ranch in the Hamakua District on Hawai'i Island testifying in support of HB 498.

I have been a rancher for most of my life and I have personally experienced an uptick in the number of agricultural crimes committed on my property. For example, I've had yard waste illegally dumped and fence lines cut, costing me both time and money to repair. Hunters have broken water lines and erroneously killed livestock. Cattle have mysteriously disappeared. All of these things can be detrimental to ranchers, who are often operating on a tight financial margin.

Trail cameras are not always effective because the remote locations do not support cell service and it's nearly impossible to catch people committing these crimes. If cameras are spotted, they get stolen. Police often have their hands tied when responding to complaints.

One of the most impactful harms is the non-regulation of brand identification in the sale of cattle. As ranchers, we work diligently to identify cattle by brand and ear-tags. When cattle are stolen and sold, buyers are not required to confirm the seller is the registered brand owner, or to provide other documentation proving ownership of the livestock.

We need help with agricultural crime oversight and I believe a dedicated law enforcement unit can help with this regulation. I strongly support the establishment of an Agricultural Crimes Council.

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 8:25:12 AM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Levi Higa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

HB498 - Relating to Agricultural Crimes

Written Testimony

Support

My name is Levi Higa and I am the co-owner of Nienie Ranch in the Hamakua District on Hawaii Island testifying in support of HB 498.

I have been a rancher for most of my life and I have personally experienced an uptick in the number of agricultural crimes committed on my property. For example, I've had yard waste illegally dumped and fence lines cut, costing me both time and money to repair. Hunters have broken water lines and erroneously killed livestock. Cattle have mysteriously disappeared. All of these things can be detrimental to ranchers, who are often operating on a tight financial margin.

Trail cameras are not always effective because the remote locations do not support cell service and it's nearly impossible to catch people committing these crimes. If cameras are spotted, they get stolen. Police often have their hands tied when responding to complaints.

One of the most impactful harms is the non-regulation of brand identification in the sale of cattle. As ranchers, we work diligently to identify cattle by brand and ear-tags. When cattle are stolen and sold, buyers are not required to confirm the seller is the registered brand owner, or to provide other documentation proving ownership of the livestock.

We need help with agricultural crime oversight and I believe a dedicated law enforcement unit can help with this regulation. I strongly support the establishment of an Agricultural Crimes Council.

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 8:27:36 AM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Candice Johnson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is essential that Hawai`i ENFORCE protections for the agriculture community. The losses on Hawai`i Island are STAGGERING and local police do NOTHING to prevent, detect, apprehend, or charge those responsible for severe losses of producers.

Testimony Presented Before the House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems

January 29th, 2025 at 9:30am

RE: HB 498 Relating to the Department of Law Enforcement – In Support

Aloha Chair Kahaloa, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Kamalei Grace, and I am writing to express my strong support for HB 498, which seeks to address the alarming rise of agricultural theft and vandalism in our State. These crimes not only inflict significant financial losses but also jeopardize the safety of farmers, ranchers, and their communities.

As farmers ourselves at Kapua Orchards, we have experienced widespread theft on our macadamia nut farm in South Kona. These crimes have caused financial strain and created an environment of uncertainty and fear. Agricultural theft and vandalism are estimated to exceed \$14 million annually, though the true scale is likely underreported due to the challenges rural locations pose for timely law enforcement responses. Staffing shortages and competing priorities further hinder the ability to address these crimes effectively.

Over the past year, we've faced significant challenges, including stolen crops, equipment, and fuel, along with illegal hunting on the farm. These incidents have disrupted operations, delayed harvests, and hurt profits—limiting our ability to reinvest in Hawaii agriculture.

Strengthening penalties for agricultural trespassing and prioritizing the prevention and prosecution of these crimes are vital steps to protect the future of Hawaii agriculture. We fully support this bill and respectfully ask the legislature to do the same to safeguard our farms, families, and livelihoods.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue and for considering this testimony.

Mahalo,

Kamalei Grace
Executive Assistant / Government Relations
Hawaiian Host Group

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 10:03:07 AM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Brittany P. Anderson	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

January 24, 2025

Re: Testimony in Strong Support of Hawaii State House Bill 498

I am writing to express my strong support for House Bill 498, which takes critical steps toward addressing agricultural crimes that threaten the livelihood of farmers, ranchers, and our state’s food security. The bill’s comprehensive approach—including establishing the Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council and allocating essential funding—represents a much-needed investment in protecting Hawaii’s agricultural industry.

Hawaii’s farmers and ranchers are the backbone of our local food systems, economic sustainability, and cultural heritage. However, the escalating prevalence of agricultural crimes, including theft, vandalism, and trespassing, continues to jeopardize their livelihoods and the broader security of our state’s food supply. The passing of HB 498 would provide critical tools and support mechanisms for enforcement agencies to combat these crimes effectively while sending a clear message that agricultural crimes will not be tolerated.

I have witnessed the devastating impact agricultural theft and related crimes can have on hardworking farmers and ranchers. In my own experience navigating the legal and enforcement process after an incident of agriculture theft, I became acutely aware of the gaps in our current system. These gaps leave producers vulnerable and make it difficult to pursue justice or recover from their losses. HB 498 is the start of addressing these challenges.

Beyond my personal experiences, I have also had the privilege of engaging with the agricultural community through advocacy and education. For example, I have spoken at community gatherings and as a panelist at the state agriculture conference, discussing best practices for preventing agricultural theft and the need for systemic reforms. These interactions have reaffirmed that farmers and ranchers seek stronger enforcement measures and a partnership with policymakers to protect their land, livelihoods, and contributions to Hawaii’s economy and sustainability goals.

Creating the Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council is an innovative solution to this ongoing issue. By bringing together key state officials, law enforcement representatives, and members of agricultural communities, the council will develop targeted crime prevention strategies, improve coordination across agencies, and encourage the reporting of agricultural crimes. Additionally,

the council's mandate to establish a central database for tracking agricultural crimes and to launch public awareness campaigns will foster greater accountability and community involvement.

By examining gaps in current legislation and proposing necessary policy updates, the Agriculture Crimes Council will play a pivotal role in protecting Hawaii's agricultural industry from further harm.

House Bill 498 is a much-needed step forward in safeguarding the livelihoods of farmers and ranchers while reinforcing the state's commitment to agricultural sustainability. I urge this committee to pass the bill and allocate the necessary resources to ensure its success.

Thank you for your time and consideration and for your dedication to supporting Hawaii's agricultural community.

Mahalo nui loa,

Brittany P. Anderson

P.O Box 372

Honomu, HI 96728

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 11:23:09 AM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angelica Melone	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

As someone who deeply cares about agriculture in Hawaii, I strongly support HB498, which would establish the Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council. This bill is crucial to ensuring the safety and livelihood of our farmers and ranchers across the state. It expands the Department of Agriculture’s role in collaborating with the Council and provides the necessary tools to address agricultural crimes more effectively, including the ability to manage funds for enforcement and support.

Agricultural crimes are not a new issue, but they have become increasingly pervasive and dangerous in recent years. Tragically, we a rancher lost his life in 2024 to illegal trespassing and poaching—a heartbreaking incident that highlights the urgent need for action. Without the threat of real penalties, these crimes will continue to threaten our food producers and our way of life here in Hawaii. We need a clear and accessible way for ranchers and farmers to report crimes, and an efficient and effective system to prosecute those responsible.

Right now, agricultural crimes are not getting the attention they need. Crime reporting is low, successful prosecutions are limited, and criminals face little deterrent. The creation of the Hawaii Agricultural Crimes Council will bring together the right people—stakeholders who understand agriculture and law enforcement—to create practical solutions that will help protect our farmers and ranchers from these growing threats. This bill is a critical step forward in ensuring the safety of our agricultural industry.

I am grateful for the opportunity to testify on behalf of this important measure and thank you for your consideration.

Testimony Presented Before the House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems

January 29th, 2025 at 9:30am

RE: HB 498 Relating to the Department of Law Enforcement – In Support

Aloha Chair Kahaloha, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committees:

My name is Hali‘a Kealoha, and I strongly support HB 498, which seeks to address the alarming rise of agricultural theft and vandalism across our State. These crimes not only inflict significant financial losses but also jeopardize the safety of our farmers, ranchers, and their communities.

At Kapua Orchards in South Kona, Hawaiian Host Group has faced widespread theft of crops, equipment, and fuel, as well as illegal hunting. These actions have not only caused significant financial strain but also fostered an environment of uncertainty and fear, severely disrupting our operations and hindering our agricultural processes.

The problem of agricultural theft and vandalism, estimated to cause losses exceeding \$14 million annually, is likely underreported due to the challenges of rural policing and timely law enforcement responses. Staffing shortages and competing priorities further hinder our ability to effectively address these crimes.

HB 498 proposes strengthening penalties for agricultural trespassing and prioritizing the prevention and prosecution of these crimes. These measures are vital for protecting our farms, our families, and our livelihoods. I fully support this bill and respectfully urge the legislature to join us in safeguarding the future of Hawai‘i’s agriculture.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing issue and for considering my testimony.

Mahalo,

Hali‘a Kealoha
Associate Corporate Communications Manager
Hawaiian Host Group

HB-498

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 1:19:46 PM

Testimony for AGR on 1/29/2025 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
james earl duffy	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support the bill.