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

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**Testimony of  
DAWN N. S. CHANG  
Chairperson**

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

**Friday, March 14, 2025  
10:00 AM**

**State Capitol, Conference Room 325 and Via Videoconference**

**In consideration of  
SENATE BILL 1582  
RELATING TO THE COCONUT TREE**

Senate Bill 1582 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.



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March 14, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

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

Conference Room 325 & Videoconference  
10:00 AM

Aloha Chair Kahaloe, 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 SB 1582**, 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, 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 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.



March 13 2025

To: Chair Kirstin Kahaloe, Vice Chair Matthias Kusch, and the House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems

Subject: SB1582, Relating to The Coconut Tree

Aloha,

I am submitting testimony in **support** of **SB1582** that recognizes the coconut palm as an official, sustainable staple food source.

[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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Aloha Chair Kahaloa, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the House Agriculture & Food Systems 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

**SB-1582**

Submitted on: 3/12/2025 1:30:57 PM

Testimony for AGR on 3/14/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Caroline Azelski	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support. Thank you.