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TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

FEBRUARY 10, 2025
1:01 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224

SENATE BILL NO. 216
RELATING TO FARM DWELLINGS

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 216. This measure prohibits the construction of new farm dwellings on agricultural park lots beginning 1/1/2026, prohibits residence within an unpermitted farm dwelling, and authorizes inspections. The Department of Agriculture offers comments with concerns.

Farm dwellings can play an important function in support of a farm. It can serve as a full-time presence for security purposes, and/or provide housing for farm hands. The inability to construct future dwellings could create a hardship for legitimate farms. Additionally, the requirement for a study that includes input from adjacent landowners and lessees, which includes the review of all appropriate buffer zones is a task that current staffing levels are unable to undertake and would require an appropriation to complete. The Department estimates it will need a supplement of \$250,000, with a commensurate ceiling increase, added to its Agricultural Parks Special Fund to procure a consultant to complete this study.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.





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February 10, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY ON SB 216
RELATING TO FARM DWELLINGS

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
1:01 PM

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice-Chair Richards, 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.

HFB supports the intent of Part 1, which clarifies that no person shall reside, live, dwell, or sleep on any agricultural park lot except within a farm dwelling. We recognize the need to address unauthorized habitation, including individuals sleeping in vehicles or unregulated structures that may pose health, safety, and land use concerns. Agricultural parks are intended for commercial farming, and it is important that their use aligns with agricultural production goals.

However, we urge the Committee to ensure that this provision is focused on preventing non-farming uses while still allowing legitimate farmers to live on their land in approved farm dwellings. Farmers living on their agricultural lots is not only a long-standing practice in agriculture but also a necessity for effective farm management, land stewardship, and food security.

We request clear enforcement guidelines to distinguish between unauthorized occupation by non-farmers and legitimate farmers who need housing on their land. By ensuring that farm dwellings remain available to working farmers, the State can address health and safety concerns while still supporting the viability of agricultural operations.

HFB strongly supports the ability of farmers to live on their land. Farmers living on-site provide many direct benefits to agricultural productivity, food security, and land conservation, including:

- **Improved farm management.** On-site farmers can monitor crops and livestock 24/7, respond to emergencies such as irrigation failures, pest outbreaks, and severe weather, and manage farm operations more efficiently.
- **Better farm security.** Theft and trespassing remain major concerns for Hawai'i farmers. Having farmers live on-site deters crime and reduces losses due to vandalism or illegal activity on agricultural lands.
- **Lower costs and economic viability for farmers.** Eliminating commuting time and costs allows small farmers, new farmers, and family-owned farms to remain financially viable, especially in Hawai'i, where land and housing costs are high.
- **Stronger rural communities and workforce stability.** Supporting farm dwellings helps retain local farmers, attract new generations into agriculture, and build resilient agricultural communities across the islands.

HFB opposes Part 2, which prohibits the construction of any new farm dwellings on Ag Park lands starting in 2026. This restriction will undermine the viability of farming in Hawai'i by making it harder for current and future farmers to manage their operations effectively and sustainably.

Prohibiting future farm dwellings ignores the critical role of on-site living in farming success and disproportionately harms small-scale, diversified, and beginning farmers. Without access to farm housing, farmers will face higher costs, increased commute burdens, and greater difficulty maintaining their operations, which could discourage future generations from entering agriculture altogether.

The existing Board of Agriculture (BOA) approval process already provides necessary oversight to ensure farm dwellings are used appropriately. Rather than prohibiting new farm dwellings outright, we encourage the State to strengthen enforcement and monitoring mechanisms to ensure agricultural lands remain dedicated to farming while still supporting the ability of farmers to reside on their land.

We respectfully request the Committee to retain the clarification in Part 1 regarding unauthorized residences while ensuring that enforcement does not negatively impact legitimate farmers who need to live on their land. Additionally, we urge the Committee to remove Part 2, which bans future farm dwellings, as this provision would harm the long-term viability of Hawai'i's agricultural industry and food security.

Hawai'i's farmers are the backbone of our local food system, and their ability to live on their farms is essential to sustaining agriculture for future generations. Supporting farm dwellings strengthens food security, rural economies, and responsible land management, all of which align with the State's constitutional mandate to conserve and protect agricultural lands

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter.