

---

# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO AGRICULTURE.

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

1       SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the land study  
2 bureau soil rating system has not been updated since its  
3 creation in the 1960s and 1970s, leading to outdated assessments  
4 of land quality and productivity. Act 189, Session Laws of  
5 Hawaii 2022, highlighted the need for regular updates to soil  
6 data to ensure that agricultural land classification reflects  
7 current soil science and supports Hawaii's food security and  
8 sustainability goals. Without updated and accurate soil  
9 information, the State cannot effectively assess agricultural  
10 land suitability or prioritize investments in agricultural  
11 sustainability.

12       The legislature further finds that accurate and up-to-date  
13 soil data, including soil characteristics, properties, and  
14 limitations, is essential for identifying risks and assessing  
15 soil suitability for various agricultural uses. Reliable soil  
16 assessments can help optimize public and private investments in  
17 agriculture, ensuring that farmers, landowners, and policymakers



1 make informed decisions that align with the State's long-term  
2 sustainability objectives. However, the lack of a standardized  
3 system for regularly updating soil information has undermined  
4 the credibility of agricultural land assessments and limited the  
5 effectiveness of state-level planning and conservation efforts.

6 The legislature finds that healthy soils are vital for  
7 sustainable agriculture, climate resilience, and food security  
8 in Hawaii. Soil health directly affects crop productivity,  
9 water retention, erosion control, and carbon sequestration, all  
10 of which are essential to reducing agricultural vulnerability  
11 and enhancing environmental sustainability.

12 The legislature further finds that investing in soil health  
13 aligns with Hawaii's goal of achieving net-negative carbon  
14 emissions by 2045 and promotes climate-smart agricultural  
15 practices that benefit farmers and the broader community.  
16 Healthy soils improve nutrient cycling, reduce reliance on  
17 synthetic fertilizers, enhance microbial biodiversity, and  
18 increase resilience to extreme weather events.

19 The legislature also recognizes that existing soil health  
20 initiatives, such as the compost reimbursement program and the  
21 cover crop pilot program, have demonstrated strong demand and



1 effectiveness in promoting soil restoration and conservation.  
2 However, these programs currently operate independently, and a  
3 coordinated, long-term strategy is necessary to maximize impact  
4 and ensure program efficiency.

5 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to establish and  
6 appropriate funds for a healthy soils program within the  
7 department of agriculture to:

- 8 (1) Integrate and manage existing programs, including the  
9 compost reimbursement program and cover crop  
10 reimbursement pilot program, under a unified healthy  
11 soils program framework;
- 12 (2) Provide education and technical assistance to farmers,  
13 ranchers, and landowners to support the adoption of  
14 healthy soil practices;
- 15 (3) Administer financial incentives and awards to  
16 encourage the implementation of regenerative  
17 agricultural practices that build soil carbon stocks  
18 and improve soil structure; and
- 19 (4) Update and refine soil data used in the land study  
20 bureau soil rating system by incorporating the latest  
21 United States Department of Agriculture Natural



1 Resources Conservation Service soil data and other  
2 relevant soil classification systems.

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

6 "§141- Healthy soils program; established. (a) The  
7 department of agriculture shall establish a healthy soils  
8 program to support and promote farm management practices that  
9 improve soil health, increase soil carbon sequestration, and  
10 enhance agricultural sustainability. The department of  
11 agriculture may consult with or contract a third party for any  
12 needed expertise to perform its duties pursuant to this section.

13 (b) The healthy soils program shall:

14 (1) Include and administer the compost reimbursement  
15 program established pursuant to section 141-16 and  
16 cover crop reimbursement pilot program established  
17 pursuant to Act 312, Session Laws of Hawaii 2022;  
18 provided that the department ensures that these  
19 programs align with the objectives and standards of  
20 the healthy soils program to maximize benefits to  
21 farmers and enhance statewide soil health;



- 1        (2) Subject to available funding, provide:
- 2            (A) Technical assistance and education to farmers,
- 3            ranchers, and landowners to support the adoption
- 4            of best soil health practices;
- 5            (B) Financial incentives and awards to encourage the
- 6            implementation of regenerative agricultural
- 7            practices that improve soil carbon storage, water
- 8            retention, and nutrient cycling; and
- 9            (C) Soil health assessments and data collection to
- 10           guide statewide policy decisions and program
- 11           adjustments;
- 12        (3) Update and refine the soil data used in the land study
- 13        bureau soil rating system by considering:
- 14           (A) The latest United States Department of
- 15           Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation
- 16           Service soil data; and
- 17           (B) Soil classification systems currently used in the
- 18           State, including methodologies assessing soil
- 19           carbon storage, water retention, and nutrient
- 20           cycling;



- 1        (4) Develop a standardized process for the regular  
2        integration of updated soil data, ensuring soil  
3        ratings reflect current conditions and advances in  
4        soil science; and
- 5        (5) Create high-resolution digital soil maps that:  
6        (A) Accurately depict soil properties, risks, and  
7        suitability for different agricultural uses;  
8        (B) Serve as a decision-making tool for farmers,  
9        policymakers, and investors; and  
10       (C) Integrate real-time monitoring capabilities,  
11       allowing for adjustments as soil conditions  
12       evolve.
- 13       (d) A public review process shall be established by the  
14       department to evaluate and refine updated soil data and draft  
15       soil maps.
- 16       (e) The department may collaborate with the following  
17       agencies for the purposes of the healthy soils program:
- 18       (1) The United States Department of Agriculture Natural  
19       Resources Conservation Service;
- 20       (2) The department of land and natural resources;
- 21       (3) The land use commission;



- 1        (4) The agribusiness development corporation;  
2        (5) The office of planning and sustainable development;  
3        (6) The university of Hawaii's college of tropical  
4           agriculture and human resilience; and  
5        (7) The county planning agencies.  
6        (f) The department of agriculture shall submit a report to  
7        the legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening  
8        of each regular session. The report shall include updates on  
9        soil data integration detailing the following:  
10       (1) Progress on soil data updates;  
11       (2) Mapping improvements and refinements; and  
12       (3) Recommendations for legislative or regulatory changes  
13           needed to align soil classification with updated  
14           scientific data."

15       SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general  
16 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$                      or so  
17 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2025-2026 and  
18 the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal  
19 year 2026-2027 for the establishment of the healthy soils  
20 program and to issue awards and other financial incentives  
21 pursuant to the program.



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

3       SECTION 4.   New statutory material is underscored.

4       SECTION 5.   This Act shall take effect on July 1, 3000.





# S.B. NO. 552 S.D. 1 H.D. 1

**Report Title:**

DOA; Healthy Soils Program; Carbon Sequestration; Reports;  
Appropriation

**Description:**

Requires the Department of Agriculture to establish a Healthy Soils Program. Requires an annual report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

