
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 State's
2 agricultural sector faces increasing challenges from climate
3 change, soil degradation, and the need for enhanced food
4 security and economic resilience. The legislature further finds
5 that the department of agriculture and biosecurity has expressed
6 concern regarding its capacity to administer conservation
7 agriculture and soil health incentive programs due to
8 limitations in technical expertise and staffing. The
9 legislature also finds that the climate change mitigation and
10 adaptation commission possesses land management expertise,
11 conservation planning capacity, and stewardship responsibilities
12 that align with the administration of agricultural conservation
13 and soil health programs. The legislature additionally finds
14 consolidating existing conservation programs under the climate
15 change mitigation and adaptation commission will eliminate
16 structural barriers that prevent small and socially
17 disadvantaged farmers from accessing conservation incentives,



1 improve administrative efficiency and coordination of statewide
2 agricultural conservation efforts.

3 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to establish the
4 conservation agriculture and soil health incentive program under
5 the climate change mitigation and adaptation commission.

6 SECTION 2. Chapter 225P, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
7 amended by adding a new section to be appropriately designated
8 and to read as follows:

9 "S225P- Conservation agriculture and soil health
10 incentive program; established; requirements; annual report.

11 (a) There is established within the commission a conservation
12 agriculture and soil health incentive program to provide
13 financial assistance and incentives, technical assistance, and
14 education that supports the adoption of science-based
15 conservation practices that improve soil health, water
16 retention, and climate resilience; increase the content of
17 organic matter in soil and carbon sequestration; reduce erosion,
18 nutrient runoff, and reliance on external inputs, including
19 synthetic fertilizers, imported feed, fossil fuels, and
20 globally-sourced raw materials; and support local food
21 production and economic viability. The program shall support:



- 1 (1) Equitable access for small and socially disadvantaged
- 2 farmers;
- 3 (2) First-time adopters of a one-time establishment
- 4 practice or annual management practice;
- 5 (3) Systemic agroecological transitions rather than input
- 6 substitution;
- 7 (4) Long-term maintenance and knowledge transfer of
- 8 farming practices that promote agricultural
- 9 conservation and soil health;
- 10 (5) Projects that incorporate traditional Native Hawaiian
- 11 ecological knowledge and ecocultural restoration; and
- 12 (6) Projects that generate co-benefits including jobs,
- 13 food security, water security, biodiversity gains, and
- 14 invasive species management.

15 (b) In administering the program, the commission shall:

- 16 (1) Subject to available funding, issue awards and other
- 17 financial incentives to promote the adoption,
- 18 application, and maintenance of a one-time
- 19 establishment practice and annual management practice
- 20 that advances conservation agriculture; provided that
- 21 the commission shall award not more than



1 \$ to an applicant; provided further that the
2 commission:
3 (A) Shall require an applicant to adopt and maintain
4 a one-time establishment practice or annual
5 management practice for at least one year;
6 (B) May award enhanced assistance to first-time
7 adopters of a one-time establishment practice or
8 annual management practice; and
9 (C) May issue an award or other financial incentive
10 to an applicant providing farmer-to-farmer
11 mentorship;
12 (2) Subject to available funding, contract a public,
13 nonprofit, or private partner to provide technical
14 assistance to a program participant; provided that the
15 commission shall give priority to a partner who is
16 experienced in the State's farming conditions;
17 provided further that pre-application technical
18 assistance shall be available to a farmer at no cost;
19 (3) Upon the request of an applicant, furnish an
20 application in the applicant's primary language;

1 (4) Develop and maintain a database to track eligible
2 agricultural conservation practices, practitioners,
3 acres, and outcomes;
4 (5) Coordinate with the university of Hawaii and relevant
5 federal agencies to evaluate program outcomes; and
6 (6) Beginning January 1, 2028, review and update program
7 procedures every three years.
8 (c) The commission shall prioritize financial and
9 technical assistance for agricultural projects of not more than
10 fifty acres for beginning farmers, Native Hawaiian farmers, and
11 socially disadvantaged farmers.
12 (d) The commission shall submit an annual report of its
13 findings and recommendations, including any proposed
14 legislation, to the legislature no later than twenty days prior
15 to the convening of each regular session. The annual report
16 shall include equity and practice persistence metrics.
17 (e) The commission shall submit a comprehensive program
18 evaluation to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to
19 the convening of the regular session of 2028 and every three
20 years thereafter. The comprehensive program evaluation shall
21 include:



- 1 (1) Information detailing participation by farm type,
- 2 size, and demographics;
- 3 (2) Information detailing the adoption and maintenance
- 4 rate of any one-time establishment practice or annual
- 5 management practice;
- 6 (3) Economic and environmental outcomes;
- 7 (4) Recommendations for program improvement; and
- 8 (5) A comparison of the program to similar programs in
- 9 other states.

10 (f) The commission shall adopt rules pursuant to

11 chapter 91 for the purposes of this section.

12 (g) For the purposes of this section:

13 "Annual management practice" means cover cropping; crop

14 rotation and diversification; organic matter amendments,

15 including compost, biochar, and local inputs; rotational grazing

16 systems, efficient nutrient and water management; integrated

17 pest management; conservation tillage; and traditional Native

18 Hawaiian agricultural practices, including loi kalo restoration.

19 "One-time establishment practice" means reforestation and

20 agroforestry systems, including windbreaks, living barriers,

21 silviculture, and silvopasture; traditional Native Hawaiian

1 farming restoration; invasive species control and ecosystem
2 restoration; organic waste management and composting
3 infrastructure; water conservation systems; and soil and water
4 conservation structures.

5 "Program" means the conservation agriculture and soil
6 health incentive program."

7 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
8 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$1,500,000 or so much
9 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the
10 climate change mitigation and adaptation commission to establish
11 the conservation agriculture and soil health incentive program.

12 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the climate
13 change mitigation and adaptation commission for the purposes of
14 this Act.

15 SECTION 4. New statutory material is underscored.

16 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

17
INTRODUCED BY: Nicole E. Lowen
JAN 16 2026

H.B. NO. 1621

Report Title:

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaption Commission; Conservation Agriculture and Soil Health Incentive Program; Agriculture; Technical Assistance; Reports; Appropriation

Description:

Establishes a Conservation Agriculture and Soil Health Incentive Program within the Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation Commission. Requires an annual report to the Legislature. Appropriates funds.

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

