THE SENATE
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2026
STATE OF HAWAII

S.B. NO. 3258

JAN 2 8 2026

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO REGIONAL AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PRODUCTION.

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

SECTION 1. The legislature finds the State's long-term food security, rural economic resilience, and institutional procurement strategies depend on a clear, data-driven understanding of what crops can be grown profitably, at scale, in different regions of the State. Current food systems plans frequently rely on assumptions regarding production capacity, supply readiness, and labor availability, rather than comprehensive agricultural feasibility assessments.

The legislature further finds that comprehensive agricultural feasibility assessments require a coordinated, multi-agency, evidence-based planning framework that integrates agro-ecological science, economic modeling, workforce analysis, and infrastructure feasibility to ensure food systems plans are adequate to support agriculture in the State. A working group is therefore necessary to produce the necessary data and information to support farmers at all scales; strengthen neighbor island food system development; align production

capacity with institutional demand; and guide state investment in agricultural infrastructure, regional kitchens, and procurement initiatives.

The purpose of this Act is to establish the regional agricultural feasibility and food systems production studies working group to provide coordinated, region-specific agricultural production and crop feasibility analysis across the State.

SECTION 2. (a) The department of agriculture and biosecurity shall establish and implement a two-year regional agricultural feasibility and food systems production studies working group to conduct island and region-specific agricultural feasibility studies to inform statewide food system planning, public procurement strategies, and agricultural investment.

(b) The working group shall be conducted through a multi-agency framework that shall consist of the following members:

(1) A representative from university of Hawaii at Manoa college of tropical agriculture and human resilience who shall be responsible for agro-ecological analysis, crop suitability, soil health, assessments, climate

and elevation modeling, and production systems research;

(2) A representative from the department of business, economic development, and tourism who shall be responsible for economic modeling, cost-of-production analysis, institutional demand alignment, regional market feasibility, and integration with economic development strategies;

(3) A representative from the agribusiness development corporation who shall be responsible for feasibility analysis of state agricultural lands, irrigation and water systems, processing and aggregation infrastructure, and other relevant agricultural facilities relevant to projected production scenarios;

(4) A representative from the department of agriculture and biosecurity who shall be responsible for statewide agricultural policy coordination and alignment with food security and agricultural development initiatives; and

(5) A representative from the department of land and natural resources who shall serve in an advisory

capacity to provide information on land classification, water resource availability, and constraints relevant to agricultural suitability.

(c) The regional agricultural feasibility and food systems production studies working group shall conduct island- and region-specific agricultural feasibility studies that assess:

(1) Crop feasibility and production potential, including:

(A) Crops that can be grown profitably by island, region, elevation, and climate zone;

(B) Expected production volumes under real-world conditions; and

(C) Production risks associated with pests, water constraints, weather variability, and market volatility;

(2) Infrastructure constraints and requirements, including:

(A) Processing, aggregation, and cold storage capacity;

(B) Access to land, water, electricity, and transportation corridors; and

(C) Regional gaps in equipment, technology, and shared-use facilities;

(3) Labor and mechanization needs, including:

(A) Current and projected agricultural labor gaps by crop and production systems;

(B) Opportunities to improve labor efficiency through mechanization or automation; and

(C) Workforce development needs, training capacity, and barriers to entry for new growers;

(4) Controlled environment agriculture opportunities, including:

(A) Identification of crops best suited for vertical farming, aquaponics, and other controlled environment systems;

(B) Feasibility of locating controlled environment systems in industrial areas or enterprise zones; and

(C) Strategies to reduce pressure on arable lands while expanding local production capacity; and

(5) Alignment of agricultural supply with institutional demand, including:

(A) Comparison of cost-of-production to institutional price points;

(B) Compatibility with regional kitchen and farm-to-school procurement forecasts; and

(C) Capacity for small-, mid-, and large-scale farms to supply institutional buyers, including off-grade products.

(d) The regional agricultural feasibility and food systems production studies working group shall prioritize neighbor island needs by:

(1) Conducting island-specific studies that reflect regional conditions, infrastructure gaps, and market access constraints;

(2) Developing recommendations that do not assume Oahu-level economies of scale; and

(3) Providing tailored strategies for infrastructure, procurement readiness, and production scaling.

(e) The working group may consult with:

(1) County agricultural offices;

(2) Farmers, ranchers, processors, and agricultural cooperatives;

(3) Institutional buyers, including the department of education, university of Hawaii, and healthcare institutions;

(4) The Hawaii emergency management agency, for climate resilience considerations; and

(5) Any other community or technical partners the working group deems relevant.

(f) The working group shall submit an interim report of its preliminary findings, recommendations, and any identified data gaps, to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of 2027.

(g) The working group shall submit a final statewide agricultural feasibility and food systems production report, including island-specific feasibility assessments, policy recommendations, and proposed investment strategies to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of 2028.

(h) Each report identified in subsections (f) and (g) shall include:

(1) Region-by-region crop feasibility maps and production scenarios;

(2) Infrastructure investment priorities;

(3) Workforce and mechanization needs assessments;

(4) Controlled-environment agriculture recommendations;

(5) Institutional procurement alignment analyses; and

(6) Strategies to support small-, mid-, and large-scale farmers.

SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of $ or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for the department of agriculture and biosecurity to implement the regional agricultural feasibility and food systems production studies working group.

The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of agriculture and biosecurity for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026, and shall be repealed on June 30, 2028.

INTRODUCED BY: Mike Gabbard

S.B. NO. 3258

Report Title:
DAB; Agriculture; Regional Agriculture Feasibility; Food Systems Planning; Study; Working Group; Reports; Appropriation

Description:
Establishes the Regional Agricultural Feasibility and Food Systems Production Studies Working Group within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to provide coordinated, region-specific agricultural production and crop feasibility analysis across the State. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds. Repeals 6/30/2028.

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