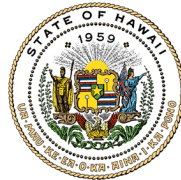


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



State of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & BIOSECURITY
KA 'OIHANA MAHI'AI A KIA'I MEAOLA
1428 South King Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96814-2512
Phone: (808) 973-9560 FAX: (808) 973-9613

SHARON HURD
Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY**

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2026
9:30 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 325**

**HOUSE BILL NO. 1606
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE**

Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 1606 that transfers the Agricultural Development Division and Aquaculture and Livestock Support Services Branch from the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to the Agribusiness Development Corporation. The Department opposes the bill.

The Agricultural Development Division is responsible for agricultural marketing and statistics. These functions work closely with USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service for specialty Crop Block Grant Program, USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service for the Market Access Program to expand export markets and the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service to provide critical statistical information to ranchers and farmers. The Division also works synergistically with the Department's Agricultural Loan Program and the Agricultural Resource Management Division to provide comprehensive service to the agriculture industry.

The Aquaculture and Livestock Support Services provide support for aquaculture and livestock businesses through planning coordination, counseling and information. The branch plays a significant role in aquaculture development and works closely with the Agricultural Loan Division to provide financing for aquaculture operations and with the Department's Aquatic Unit's veterinarian for disease surveillance and investigations.

The Department has concerns that the loss of synergy within the economic development functions of the department may result in less support for the agricultural and aquaculture industries and hinder the Department from reaching the goal of doubling local food production. In addition, transferring agreements from Federal

Testimony of Sharon Hurd
January 30, 2026
Page 2

Agencies to the Agribusiness Development Corporation may require federal approval, which is not under the control of the department.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR



WENDY GADY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII
AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
HUI HO'OU LU AINA MAHIAI

TESTIMONY OF WENDY L. GADY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS
January 30, 2026
9:30 a.m.
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference

HOUSE BILL NO. 1606
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Chairperson Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee:

We are writing to submit **comments** on the proposed transfer of the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity's Aquaculture and Livestock Support Services to the Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC). This transition represents a strategic opportunity to strengthen Hawai'i's food production systems, expand export capacity, and advance long-term economic, environmental, and social benefits for the State.

It is important to clarify that ADC's interest is limited to the commercial and industry development functions associated with aquaculture and livestock support services. ADC does not seek to assume regulatory authority related to animal health, biosecurity enforcement, inspections, or permitting compliance, which appropriately remain within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity. This proposal is focused on strengthening business development, infrastructure planning, and industry expansion capacity, not regulatory oversight.

As Hawai'i works to increase local food production, enhance biosecurity, and grow high-value agricultural exports, it is increasingly clear that technical and regulatory support alone is not sufficient. Producers, particularly in aquaculture

and livestock—also require coordinated business development capacity, including market analysis, infrastructure planning, capital formation, and public-private partnership development. ADC’s statutory mission and operating model are uniquely suited to deliver this integrated approach. Unlike regulatory agencies, ADC’s strength lies in its ability to acquire land, develop shared-use infrastructure, finance and manage facilities, and structure public-private partnerships that reduce risk for industry investors. These tools are essential for scaling aquaculture and livestock enterprises but are not functions traditionally performed by regulatory agencies.

A critical and persistent challenge facing Hawai‘i’s aquaculture and livestock industries is access to suitable space to grow—whether for production, processing, research and development, or value-added activities. Limited availability of appropriately zoned land, specialized facilities, and supporting infrastructure has constrained expansion and discouraged private investment.

For several years, the Legislature has asked ADC and DBEDT to articulate a coordinated strategy to anchor and expand Hawai‘i’s aquaculture industry. While the need and opportunity are clear, ADC currently lacks the dedicated staff capacity and program resources required to develop and execute a comprehensive statewide industry development strategy. Without this capacity, the State remains reactive rather than strategic in supporting aquaculture growth.

ADC has clear statutory authority to acquire, hold, develop, and manage land, buildings, and infrastructure in support of agricultural development. Locating aquaculture and livestock support services within ADC would allow the State to more strategically plan for and invest in facilities and sites that enable industry growth, including shared-use infrastructure, innovation and incubation spaces, and production-ready lands. This capability directly supports industry scaling, reduces barriers to entry, and strengthens Hawai‘i’s competitiveness in domestic and export markets.

Transferring aquaculture and livestock support services to ADC would also strengthen coordination among the Department of Business, Economic

Development and Tourism's attached agencies and divisions, including the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawai'i Authority (NELHA), the Office of Planning & Sustainable Development, and the Land Use Commission. ADC, NELHA, HTDC executed a Memorandum of Agreement in 2024 to better coordinate statewide aquaculture planning, infrastructure development, and commercialization pathways. Locating industry development functions within ADC strengthens the State's ability to align land-based and ocean-based aquaculture strategies under a coordinated framework.

This alignment creates a strong platform for collaboration in support of a Blue Ocean Economy directive—integrating aquaculture, renewable energy, innovation, land-use planning, and export-oriented economic development. ADC's land and infrastructure authority, combined with NELHA's ocean-based research and commercialization expertise and the planning and permitting roles of the Office of Planning & Sustainable Development and the Land Use Commission, would foster a more coordinated, predictable, and investment-ready environment for aquaculture and livestock enterprises statewide.

From an economic perspective, this approach supports scalable food production, expands export capacity, attracts private investment, and creates stable jobs in rural and coastal communities. Environmentally, coordinated land, water, and ocean-based planning promotes sustainable resource use and climate resilience. Socially, expanding aquaculture and livestock production strengthens food security, supports local producers, and reinforces agriculture and ocean industries as viable long-term career pathways for Hawai'i's residents.

To ensure that aquaculture perspectives are consistently represented as these programs evolve, we respectfully recommend that one of ADC's At-Large Board member seats be designated for a representative of the aquaculture industry. This representation would provide essential sector-specific insight and help guide policy and investment decisions aligned with industry needs and Blue Ocean Economy objectives.

The addition of five (5) full-time equivalent positions is not program expansion for its own sake, but rather foundational capacity necessary to responsibly absorb transferred functions and, critically, to allow ADC to finally develop and execute a coordinated aquaculture and livestock industry development strategy for the State. Without these administrative and program support resources, ADC cannot deliver the planning, project development, and interagency coordination expected by the Legislature. In summary, transferring Aquaculture and Livestock Support Services to ADC—paired with ADC's land and infrastructure authorities, enhanced inter-agency collaboration, appropriate governance representation, and adequate staffing—offers a forward-looking, systems-based approach to advancing Hawai'i's food production, export capacity, and Blue Ocean Economy goals.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to share these comments. We would be pleased to discuss this recommendation further at your convenience.

C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.
Mayor



Benson Medina
Director

Dennis Lin
Deputy Director

County of Hawai'i

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

25 Aupuni Street, Room 1301 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720-4252
(808) 961-8366 • Fax (808) 935-1205
E-mail: chresdev@co.hawaii.hi.us

January 29, 2026
HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

Friday, January 30, 2026
9:30 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 325

TESTIMONY ON HB 1606: Relating to Agriculture

Aloha Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch and Members of the Committee,

I am Benson Medina, Director of the Department of Research and Development, County of Hawai'i. One of the agricultural objectives of this department is to "support research, development, control, and education that improves agricultural production, quality, resilience, and producer viability." The County of Hawai'i provides **written comments on HB1606** to transfer oversight of the Aquaculture and Livestock Support Services (ALSS) Branch and the Agricultural Development Division (ADD) of the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to the Agribusiness Development Corporation.

Hawai'i County has 3,638 farms and 20+ farming associations that fall under and utilize services related to the Agricultural Development Division, while ADC assets in Hawai'i County are still in development. Hawai'i County is also the leading county in the State in terms of aquaculture sales, with 21 reported aquaculture farms. We ask that any decision of whether to transfer ALSS and ADD is made after further input from Hawai'i island stakeholders and thorough consideration of any potential impacts on producers and associations.

Additionally, we request the committee take into consideration the statutes of each department and assess if transferring any of the programs that ADD administers to ADC would affect the ability of the state to administer these programs. Given that more than \$8 million in federal funds were administered through ADD in 2023-2024 (HDOA, 2024), it is important that producers do not lose opportunities because of a loss of capacity within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to receive federal funding opportunities. The Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program, a USDA program to build resilience in the middle of the food supply chain, states: "eligible entities are departments of agriculture in States and Territories," (USDA). Given the current economic disruptions affecting producers, please consider possible interruptions to crucial funding streams resulting from a transfer. Thank you for championing agriculture in Hawai'i and for the opportunity to provide comments on HB1606.

Respectfully,

Benson Medina
Director

HB-1606

Submitted on: 1/28/2026 6:21:11 AM

Testimony for AGR on 1/30/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cathy Goeggel	Animal Rights Hawai'i	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

We oppose this transfer because Agribusiness Development Corp. has a long, tainted history, and should be dissolved. We feel that beaurocratic oversight of agriculture in Hawai'i has created swollen agencies such as ADC, which do nothing positive or farmers. Please table HB1606. Mahalo!

HB-1606

Submitted on: 1/28/2026 6:58:57 PM

Testimony for AGR on 1/30/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jim WYBAN	HIplan	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair and Committee Members,

I submit this testimony on behalf of HIplan in strong support of House bill 1606.

HIplan is a Hilo-based, 10 year old entrepreneur support organization. Our Founder/Chair Dr. Jim Wyban has many years in aquaculture and is globally considered the father of the SPF Broodstock industry. This industry was born in Hawaii from Hawaii-based R&D that transformed global shrimp farming and caused a 6-fold increase in global production.

It is a great example of innovation in aquaculture developed in Hawaii becoming a world changing technology.

We want to see the State make a significant investment in the aquaculture industry as it's a perfect fit with Hawaii's culture, environment, location and experience. Hawaii is recognized globally as a center of excellence in aquaculture and could be even more with State support.

More funding in the Aquaculture industry is a natural fit for Hawaii.

In summary HIplan strongly supports HB 1606.

Mahalo for your time and opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jim Wyban
Founder/Chair HIplan



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT WITH COMMENTS
House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems
Rep. Cory M. Chun, Chair
Rep. Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair

Rep. Kirstin Kahaloa
Rep. Nicole E. Lowen
Rep. Amy A. Perruso

Rep. Sean Quinlan
Rep. Lauren Matsumoto

HB1606 – RELATING TO AGRICULTURE
by
Dick Jones, HAAA Executive Director

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Dick Jones, and I serve as Executive Director of the Hawai‘i Aquaculture and Aquaponics Association. HAAA represents commercial aquaculture producers, researchers, and allied businesses across the State of Hawai‘i.

HAAA submits this testimony in support of HB1606, with comments.

Aquaculture is a meaningful and growing part of Hawai‘i’s agricultural economy. State data show that aquaculture generates hundreds of millions of dollars in annual economic activity, supports well over a thousand direct jobs, and contributes significantly to rural employment, food security, and local supply chains. The industry spans finfish, shellfish, algae, hatcheries, and advanced technologies, and it requires long-term planning horizons and capital investment to succeed.

For these reasons, Hawai‘i’s aquaculture industry depends on clear governance, consistent oversight, and long-term certainty. HB1606 presents an opportunity to better align the State’s aquaculture development, land management, and industry support functions in a way that supports long-term growth.

From a strategic and economic development perspective, consolidation makes sense. A significant portion of Hawai‘i’s aquaculture industry is already operating within the Department of Business, Economic Development, and Tourism through the Natural Energy Laboratory of Hawai‘i Authority. The Hawai‘i Technology Development Corporation and its Small Business Innovation Research program, both housed within DBEDT, serve as the State’s lead platforms for technology innovation, an area in which aquaculture has been particularly active. In addition,

the Agribusiness Development Corporation already administers land and leases for aquaculture operations, including a large-scale tenant on Kauaʻi.

Bringing aquaculture development, land management, and support services into closer alignment under a single department focused on economic development and innovation has the potential to improve coordination, reduce fragmentation, and support more effective long-term planning. At the same time, HAAA recognizes the importance of maintaining specialized functions, such as aquatic animal health and import regulation, within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity, where that expertise is best supported.

From an industry standpoint, the potential value of this bill lies in whether it results in clearer accountability, better defined roles and responsibilities, and a more responsive structure for supporting aquaculture statewide. Producers have raised important questions about how existing lands, leases, approvals, and agreements would be administered under any new structure. These questions are not theoretical. They go directly to land tenure security, continuity, and the ability of existing operations to continue without disruption.

Aquaculture requires secure land tenure and long-term stability. Any transfer of authority or responsibility must clearly protect existing approvals, leases, negotiated terms, and pending agreements, and must recognize aquaculture as a distinct agricultural use with long-term leasing needs, as specifically provided for in HRS. Without that clarity, uncertainty alone can delay investment, slow expansion, and limit the industry's ability to contribute to Hawaiʻi's economy.

HAAA believes it is important for industry to remain engaged as this bill moves through the legislative process. Industry participation will be essential to identifying necessary refinements and ensuring that implementation supports, rather than disrupts, existing operations and future development.

In closing, HAAA supports HB1606 as a proposal worth advancing for continued discussion and refinement, with the understanding that industry concerns must be addressed clearly and transparently as the bill progresses. We look forward to working with the Legislature, the Agribusiness Development Corporation, the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity, and DBEDT to ensure that any changes strengthen Hawaiʻi's aquaculture sector and support long-term economic growth.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,
Dick Jones
Executive Director
Hawaiʻi Aquaculture and Aquaponics Association

Officers

Kaipo Kekona
State President



Christian Zuckerman
Vice-President

Maureen Datta
Secretary

Reba Lopez
Treasurer

Chapter Presidents

Kelii Gannet
Kohala, Hawai'i

East Hawai'i

Puna, Hawai'i

Ka'u, Hawai'i

Maureen Datta
Kona, Hawai'i

Gina Lind
Hāna, Maui

Mason Scharer
Haleakalā, Maui

Kaiea Medeiros
Mauna Kahālāwai,
Maui

Kaipo Kekona
Lahaina, Maui

Kilia Avelino-Purdy
Moloka'i

Negus Manna
Lāna'i

India Clark
North Shore, O'ahu

Christian Zuckerman
Wai'anae, O'ahu

Rachel LaDrig
Waimānalo, O'ahu

Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, O'ahu

Natalie Urminska
Kaua'i

Aloha Chair Chun, 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 offers comments on HB1606.**

HB1606 proposes significant structural changes within Hawaii's agricultural governance, specifically transferring the oversight of the Aquaculture and Livestock Support Services Branch from the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB) to the Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC), and similarly reassigning the Agricultural Development Division. While this restructuring aims to streamline operations and integrate biosecurity efforts with agribusiness development, there are concerns regarding the potential implications this transition might have on the agricultural community, particularly small and medium-scale farmers.

The Hawaii Farmers Union is apprehensive about the consolidation of DAB functions into ADC. The ADC has historically focused on large-scale agribusiness projects, which raises concerns about whether the needs and challenges faced by smaller, diverse farming operations will be adequately addressed under its management. There's a risk that the nuanced, grassroots-level support that DAB has provided to farmers could be overshadowed by a broader, more commercial-oriented approach. It is crucial to ensure that as these transitions occur, the individualized support and development resources farmers depend upon are maintained and that small-scale operations are not disadvantaged in favor of larger agribusiness interests. Enhanced oversight, clear mechanisms for stakeholder engagement, and assurances of continued support for diverse agricultural practices will be vital in addressing these concerns.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union



LATE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

Rep. Cory M. Chun, Chair
Rep. Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair

HB1606
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Friday, January 30, 2026, 9:30am
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference

Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **opposes HB1606** which transfers oversight of the Aquaculture and Livestock Support Services Branch of the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to the Agribusiness Development Corporation and transfers the Agricultural Development Division of DAB to the ADC

When there is a threat of aquaculture or livestock disease, the veterinarians within this branch work closely with state veterinarians and vet medical officers in the Animal Industry Division and the USDA. This close working relationship allows the state to investigate, contain and resolve outbreaks immediately, which protects the industry. Moving this branch to another Department is concerning.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify on this measure. The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council (HCC) is the Statewide umbrella organization comprised of the four county-level Cattlemen's Associations. Ranchers produce a high-quality protein and are the stewards of almost 750 thousand acres of land in Hawaii, or nearly 20% of the State's total land mass. We represent the interests of Hawaii's cattle producers.

Nicole Galase
Hawaii Cattlemen's Council
Managing Director

