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State of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & BIOSECURITY
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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 WAYS AND MEANS

**TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2026
10:17 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 211**

**SENATE BILL NO. 2153, SENATE DRAFT 1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE**

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 2153, Senate Draft 1 that requires the Board of Agriculture and Biosecurity to develop and adopt a multi-tiered, matrix-based assessment framework to develop definitions for the terms "bona fide farmer" and "bona fide agricultural activity". The Board is to collaborate with stakeholders to draft the terms "bona fide farmer" and "bona fide agricultural activity". A report to the 2027 Legislature is to contain the draft definitions and any proposed legislation. There is no appropriation. The Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (Department) offers comments.

The Department believes the bill's "multi-tiered, matrix-based assessment framework" may be too prescriptive for the Department and our informal collaborators consisting of "...engaged agricultural entities and organizations" to draft, develop, and adopt comprehensive definitions for the terms "bona fide farmer" and "bona fide agricultural activity." The result of this loosely described effort may be a sort of farmer and/or farm business certification program within Chapter 141 that may substantively affect existing legal definitions and programs for agricultural operators and agricultural resources found throughout State law and the counties' ordinances. Further, this certification program will require professional staff and necessary funding.

The Department urges the authors of this measure to consider the recommendations made in response to prior legislation such as Act 278 (Session Laws of Hawaii 2019) that resulted in Senate Bill 2706 (2020 Session) that recommended a family occupying a "farm dwelling" earn a \$10,000 minimum annual income from agricultural activity, subject to verification by tax filings or agricultural tax dedication.

Testimony of Sharon Hurd

March 3, 2026

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This measure and others like it focus on the measurable outcome of agricultural activity and not the qualifications of the person, family, or other entity carrying out the agricultural production activity.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our testimony.



OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

‘Ōlelo Hō‘ike ‘Aha Kau Kānāwai
COMMENTS ON SB2153 SD1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Hawai‘i Capitol

March 3, 2026

10:17AM

Room 211

Aloha e Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) offers **COMMENTS** on **SB2153 SD1**, which requires the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB) to develop a multi-tiered matrix for defining “bona fide farmer” and “bona fide agricultural activities.”

OHA appreciates the intent of this measure to ensure that agricultural lands are used for legitimate agricultural activities and that exemptions for agricultural tourism and residential use are not exploited to facilitate patently non-agricultural uses and long term degradation of agriculture lands. At the same time, for Native Hawaiians, agriculture is a fundamental part of cultural practices, perpetuating ‘ike kūpuna, expressing kuleana and pilina with ‘āina, and allowing for ‘ohana and community subsistence. Traditional and customary practices such as lo‘i kalo, loko i‘a, agroforestry, and other ahupua‘a-based systems are vital to community food security and cultural identity, yet don’t always generate monetary income.

It is for this reason that OHA strongly supports the recognition of subsistence, cultural, and community-based agricultural production as legitimate and bona fide agricultural activities (page 5, line 10-13) (definition of “Tier II. Small-scale and diversified farmers”). As DAB develops definitions of “bona fide farmer” and “bona fide agricultural activity,” meaningful consultation with Native Hawaiian farmers, cultural practitioners, homestead communities, and subsistence producers will be essential to ensure that any adopted definitions are culturally informed and equitable. However, even with consultation and inclusion of subsistence and traditional farmers, OHA is concerned that the proposed requirements may prove onerous for small scale farmers.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify on this critical issue.



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March 3, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

TESTIMONY ON SB 2153, SD1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Conference Room 211 & Videoconference
10:17 AM

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Moriwaki, 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.

The Hawai'i Farm Bureau supports the intent of SB 2153, SD1, which requires the Board of Agriculture and Biosecurity to work collaboratively with stakeholders to develop definitions for the terms "bona fide farmer" and "bona fide agricultural activity," and to report those definitions to the Legislature.

The issue of defining "bona fide agriculture" has come before the Legislature and the Counties multiple times over the years. Historically, while the term was not explicitly defined in statute, there was a general understanding of who farmers and ranchers were and what constituted agricultural activity. Over time, agricultural practices have diversified, land use pressures have increased, and that shared understanding has become less clear.

There are numerous policies, programs, and land use designations that are intended specifically to support agriculture. These tools are meant for bona fide agricultural producers, and the lack of clarity around definitions can create challenges for policymakers, agencies, and counties tasked with implementing those programs fairly and consistently. At the same time, agriculture in Hawai'i encompasses a wide range of operations, scales, and production models that cannot be easily captured by a single rigid definition.

HFB appreciates that SB 2153, SD1 does not attempt to immediately codify a one-size-fits-all definition. Instead, it directs the Board of Agriculture and Biosecurity to engage stakeholders and develop a multi-tiered, matrix-based framework that recognizes the

diversity of agricultural operations while discouraging misuse of agricultural designations. Other jurisdictions, including Guam, have explored tiered approaches to recognizing agricultural activity, which may provide useful reference points as Hawai'i works through a stakeholder-driven process to develop definitions that reflect local conditions.

HFB looks forward to participating in the stakeholder process to develop definitions for bona fide farmers and bona fide agricultural activity. Any framework should recognize differences in scale, production type, geography, and market realities, while remaining practical to administer and enforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important and complex issue.



Hawaii Cattlemen's Council, Inc.

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair
Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair

SB2153
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, January 28, 2026, 3:00 PM
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

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

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **supports SB2153** which requires the Board of Agriculture and Biosecurity to develop and adopt a multi-tiered, matrix-based assessment framework to develop definitions for the terms "bona fide farmer" and "bona fide agricultural activity."

Clearly defining a bonafide farmer allows those who are truly producing food for the community to gain access to the support needed from state programs. In a time where we are losing agricultural land to other uses, it also ensures that state agricultural lands are indeed used for agricultural activities.

Defining a bonafide farmer is a difficult task, as many agricultural producers vary. However, this multi-tiered approach and the directive to work with stakeholders to determine these definitions is a path forward to recognizing that bonafide farmers can operate differently, but must be defined in order to receive benefits without losing out on land and resources to gentleman farmers.

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



SB-2153-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 6:39:39 AM

Testimony for WAM on 3/3/2026 10:17:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keoni Shizuma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am testifying in support of SB2153.

This bill recognizes the different levels of engagement of farming, as well as the transitional period required for someone to become a farmer. Identifying and classifying the different types/scales of farming is key and better fits into the world we live in today. With the high cost of living and of doing business in Hawaii, there are many who are farming but need to have other sources of income to survive. It is simply not feasible for most farmers to be financially successful and sustainable in Hawaii. If we continue to only acknowledge full-time farmers as bonafied farmers, we will be restricting and preventing many who are interested in farming on a smaller scale from producing their own crops.

If we hope to one day grow most of the food that we consume, we have to create a space and pathway for small scale, part-time farmers to get involved and farm. We cannot acknowledge (and depend) only on the large scale, industrial farmers to grow the food we need for Hawaii to be sustainable, we need small scale and subsistence farming to be acknowledged as well, which I believe this bill does.

Mahalo for your consideration,
Keoni Shizuma