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Governor

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Lt. Governor



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Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

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

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2026
3:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224**

**SENATE BILL NO. 2153
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 2153 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 "...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 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 Law 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

January 28, 2026

Page 2

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.



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January 28, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY ON SB 2153
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
3:00 PM

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice-Chair Richards, 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, 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 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.



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

Submitted on: 1/27/2026 11:57:05 AM
Testimony for AEN on 1/28/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Austin Martin	Testifying for Libertarian Party of Hawaii	Oppose	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and committee members. I am Austin Martin, Chair of the Libertarian Party of Hawaii, testifying in opposition to SB 2153 (Agricultural Framework/Beekeeping).

SB 2153 imposes additional regulatory frameworks on beekeeping operations, adding compliance requirements for small-scale producers without demonstrated public necessity. These burdens raise costs and limit innovation in pollination services. I recommend defeating the measure and enforcing property rights as the primary protection for pollinators.

Save the bees (and their keepers) from parasites!

Mahalo for opposing yet another attack against free market agriculture.

Austin Martin

Libertarian Party

SB-2153

Submitted on: 1/27/2026 7:42:23 PM
Testimony for AEN on 1/28/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Robert Bence	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha,

Please pass this bill and any and all others that might help farmers deal with the scourge of fake farms and those not even pretending to farm from buying up and destroying are agricultural lands and the ability of bonafide farmers to afford the land we need to farm. It's a small community of farmers across the state it could be larger if the state land use was enforced.

Mahalo

Rob