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SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS  
Wednesday, February 25, 2026 — 10:55 a.m.

**Ulupono Initiative strongly supports SB 2319 SD1, Relating to the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity.**

Dear Chair Dela Cruz and Members of the Committee:

My name is Micah Munekata, and I am the Vice President of Government Affairs at Ulupono Initiative. We are a Hawai'i-focused impact investment firm that strives to improve the quality of life throughout the islands by helping our communities become more resilient and self-sufficient through locally produced food, renewable energy and clean transportation choices, and better management of freshwater resources.

**Ulupono strongly supports SB 2319 SD1**, which appropriates funds for one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) grant writer position within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB) and converts the position from temporary to permanent.

Ulupono supports the State's efforts to actively pursue grant opportunities that help local agriculturalists. Many federal programs are dedicated to aiding departments or agencies across the states that can apply for funding to support local initiatives. General funding the existing DAB grant writer position at \$100,000 is extremely timely, not only to secure new funding for local farmers and ranchers, but also to preserve existing grant funding amid current uncertainties at the federal level.

In 2025, the DAB grant writer secured nearly \$9 million in federal grants—a massive return on the State's investment. In addition to managing \$1.5 million in recurring grants, DAB has identified more than \$54 million in new federal opportunities to support diverse agricultural initiatives, including innovative solutions, water infrastructure improvements, and expanding local processing capacity and market access. DAB is well positioned to secure significant federal resources, but only if equipped with sufficient staff capacity to pursue these opportunities, as many of these grants require complex applications with detailed project budgets, measurable outcomes, and coordination across agencies and stakeholders. Without this capacity, Hawai'i risks leaving millions in federal dollars on the table that could otherwise support critical investments in agricultural infrastructure, food security, and more.

*Investing in a Sustainable Hawai'i*



To further illustrate the substantial return on investment from agricultural grant writing, we offer an example from the private nonprofit sector: Over the past 11 years, Ulupono invested \$1.4 million in grant writers through organizations such as The Kohala Center, the O‘ahu Agriculture and Conservation Association, and the Hawai‘i Farm Bureau. These efforts secured approximately \$140 million for local agriculture—a 100x return on investment. This included unprecedented funding from USDA programs such as \$40 million from the Climate-Smart Commodities program, \$30 million from the Regional Food Business Centers program, and \$3.2 million from the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure program.

General funding DAB’s grant writer will similarly prove well worth the investment and result in millions of dollars in federal funding to further support the State’s agricultural efforts.

We appreciate this committee’s effort to hear important measures that look to establish long-term support for our local farmers and ranchers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Micah Munekata  
Vice President of Government Affairs

Attachment

# STRENGTHENING DAB'S ABILITY TO ACCESS FEDERAL FUNDING

Funding the existing Hawai'i Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB) grant writer is a valuable investment that can yield a high return and long-term benefits for the state. This role is essential not only for pursuing new funding but also for maintaining existing federal grants amidst uncertainties in the funding landscape. Strengthening this capacity immediately is critical for the department's efforts.

## Budget Request

### General fund the existing DAB grant position at \$100,000.

- In 2025, the DAB grant writer collaborated across multiple state agencies and key agricultural stakeholders to apply for more than \$17 million in federal grants, which resulted in nearly \$8.9 million in federal funding awards for Hawai'i's agriculture industry. In addition to managing nearly \$1.5 million in recurring grants, DAB has identified more than \$54 million in new federal opportunities to support diverse agricultural initiatives, including innovative solutions, water infrastructure improvements, and expanding local processing capacity and market access.

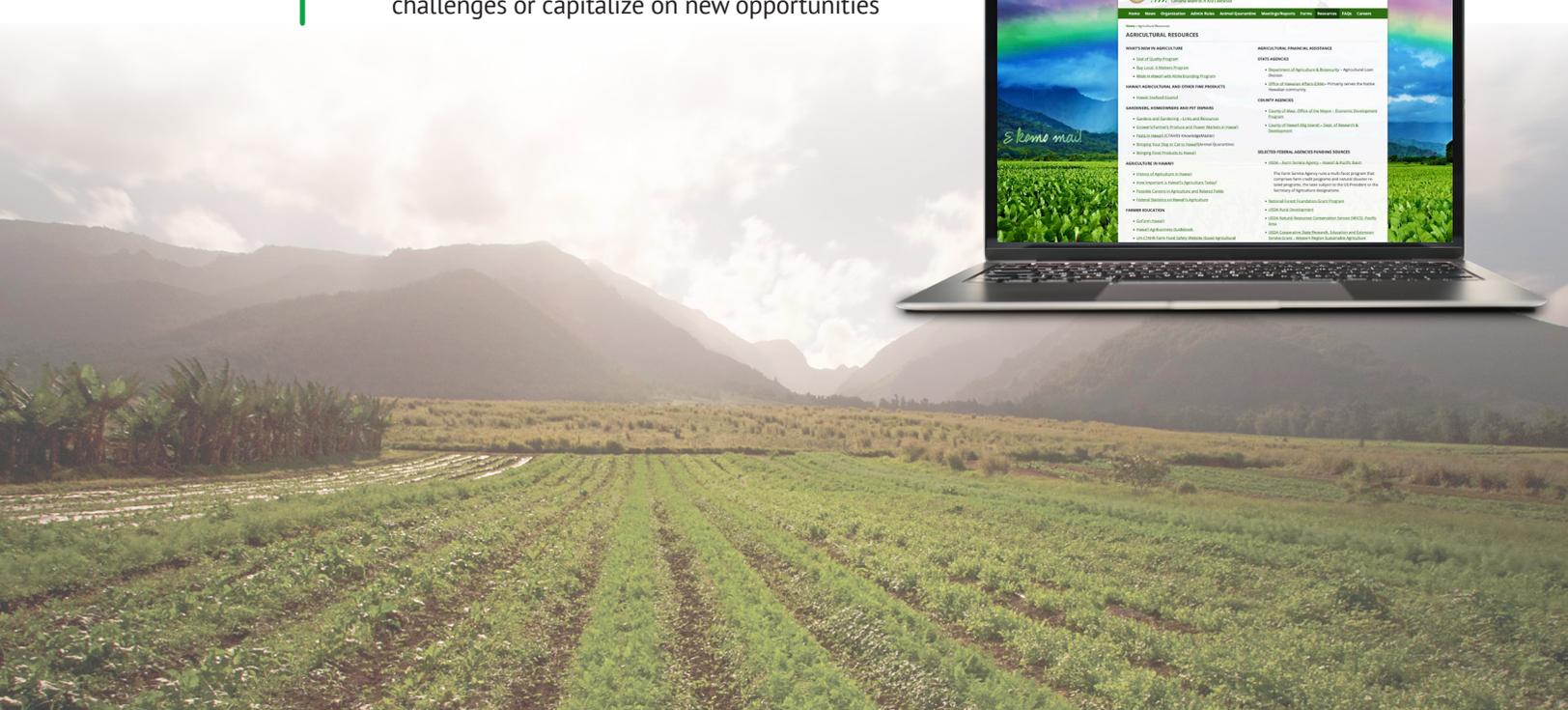
## Why Grant Writers?

### Skilled grant writers will help the State to:

- Access federal funds by preparing competitive and compelling grant proposals that align with local farmer needs
- Identify and pursue grants that supplement and leverage existing State resources, maximizing the impact of DAB's programs

### Federal grants will provide:

- Additional means to support important projects and services without solely relying on State funds, especially in times of natural disasters and economic hardship
- A diversified source of long-term funding for DAB, offering stability and flexibility to address emerging challenges or capitalize on new opportunities



# STRENGTHENING DAB'S ABILITY TO ACCESS FEDERAL FUNDING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

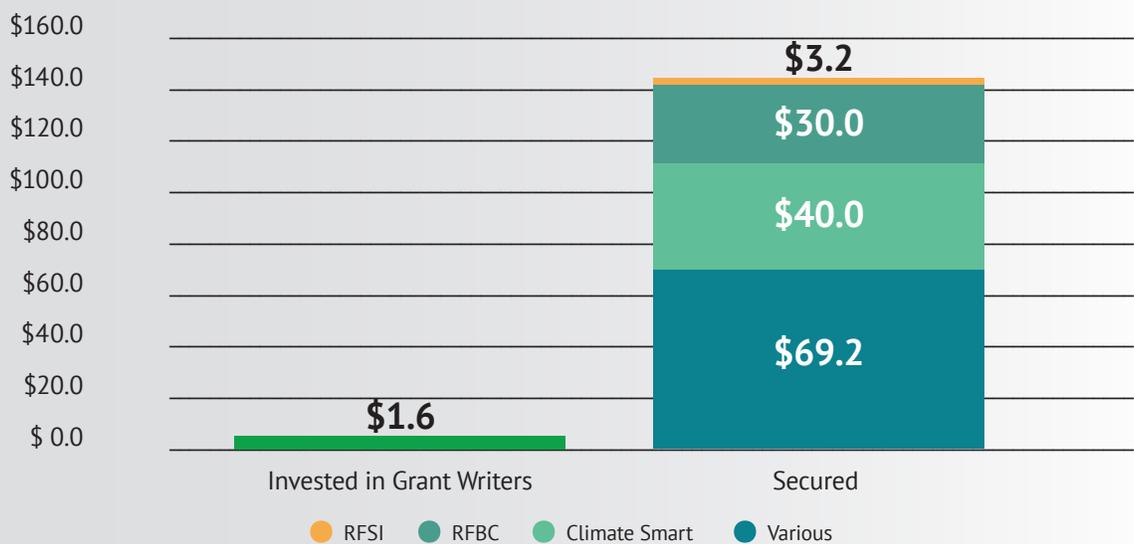


## Other Benefits for the State

**By having grant writers on DAB's staff, the State will benefit from:**

- Grant writing is a specialized skill, and having dedicated grant writers allows other DAB staff to focus on their core responsibilities leading to better use of resources and expertise.
- Aligned grant-seeking efforts with the DAB's strategic goals and priorities ensures that all federal funding opportunities will support the agency's long-term objectives.
- Stronger partnership with Hawai'i's congressional delegation to better communicate the agricultural industry's needs.

**Funding Invested vs. Secured (\$s in Millions)**



## Return on Investment

**Grant writers provide a significant return on investment.**

Investing in grant-writing capacity not only pays for itself but also brings in funds several times the initial investment.

- Ulupono Initiative invested \$1.6 million in grant writers over the past 11 years through organizations such as The Kohala Center, O'ahu Agriculture & Conservation Association, and Hawai'i Farm Bureau.
- Secured ~\$140 million for local agriculture (100x return on investment).
- This included unprecedented funding from the USDA.
  - \$3.2 million from the newly created USDA Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) program.
  - \$40 million from the Climate-Smart Commodities program to help farmers fund climate-smart farming practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The program is currently paused and being renamed. Future funding availability is anticipated.
  - \$30 million from the Regional Food Business Centers (RFBC) program to establish regional centers, which provide farmers with grants and connect them with federal programs. The program has been removed by the current federal administration despite being awarded to Hawai'i.



P.O. Box 253, Kunia, Hawai'i 96759  
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e-mail [info@hfbf.org](mailto:info@hfbf.org); [www.hfbf.org](http://www.hfbf.org)

February 25, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

**TESTIMONY ON SB 2319, SD1**  
RELATING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY

Conference Room 211 & Videoconference  
10:55 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 SB 2319, SD1**, which appropriates funds for one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) grant writer position within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity and converts the position from temporary to permanent.

As direct federal appropriations for agriculture continue to decline, state agencies and agricultural stakeholders have become increasingly reliant on competitive federal and private grant programs. Successfully accessing these funds requires specialized expertise, long-term continuity, and the ability to manage complex application and compliance requirements.

We supported similar legislation last year to establish grant specialist capacity within DAB. SB 2319, SD1 builds on that effort by recognizing that grant development and management are ongoing functions that require permanent staffing, rather than temporary or ad hoc contracting. Maintaining a permanent grant writer position improves institutional knowledge, continuity, and long-term competitiveness for federal funding.

Improved grant capacity at DAB benefits farmers and ranchers statewide by increasing the State's ability to secure resources that support agricultural production, biosecurity, food security initiatives, and related infrastructure. These grants often help expand capacity, create new business opportunities, and support workforce development within the agricultural sector.

SB 2319, SD1 represents a practical and cost-effective investment that strengthens DAB's ability to leverage external funding and better serve Hawai'i's agricultural community.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.





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**Executive Officers**

**Kit Okimoto**, Okimoto Corp., *Chair*  
**Jayson Watts**, Mahi Pono, *Vice Chair*  
**Jill Tamura**, Tamura Super Market, *Secretary/Treas.*  
**Lauren Zirbel**, HFIA, *President and Executive Director*  
**Paul Kosasa**, ABC Stores, *Advisor*  
**Toby Taniguchi**, KTA Superstores, *Advisor*  
**Joe Carter**, Coca-Cola Bottling of Hawaii, Odom, *Advisor*  
**Eddie Asato**, Pint Size Hawaii, *Advisor*  
**Gary Okimoto**, Safeway, *Advisor*  
**Maile Miyashiro**, C&S Wholesale, *Immediate Past Chair*

TO: Committee on Ways and Means  
FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION  
Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: February 25, 2026  
TIME: 10:55am

RE: SB2319 SD1 Relating to the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity  
Position: Support

The Hawaii Food Industry Association is comprised of two hundred member companies representing retailers, suppliers, producers, manufacturers and distributors of food and beverage related products in the State of Hawaii.

HFIA is in support of this measure to appropriate funds for the existing temporary grant writer position within the department of agriculture and biosecurity and to make the position permanent. Grant writers serve a vital role in securing funds for Hawaii's agricultural sector. As we've seen with the recent awards, there can be a tremendous return on investment when the State ensures there is a dedicated individual in this role.

We encourage the Committee to pass this measure and we thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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Mason Scharer  
Haleakalā, Maui

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Kaipo Kekona  
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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 Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Senate Ways and Means 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 supports SB2319.**

SB2319 is crucial for enhancing the capacity of Hawaii's Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to secure necessary funding through grants. By appropriating funds for a full-time grant writer position and converting this role from temporary to permanent, the bill ensures that the department can consistently pursue and manage grant opportunities.

Investing in this position demonstrates a commitment to the long-term resilience and prosperity of Hawaii agriculture. This is essential for advancing biosecurity measures, supporting local farmers, and promoting agricultural sustainability. The stability of a permanent position allows for the development of long-term strategies and partnerships, increasing the department's effectiveness in safeguarding Hawaii's unique ecosystems and agricultural interests.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin  
Advocacy Director  
Hawai'i Farmers Union



COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS  
Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair

**SB2319 SD1**  
RELATING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY.

Wednesday, February 25, 2026, 10:55 AM  
Conference Room 211 & Videoconference

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

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **supports SB2319 SD1** which appropriates funds for one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) grant writer position within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity and converts the position from temporary to permanent.

Grant writing is often time-consuming and requires thorough knowledge of the process to be successful. While grant funds are available, this difficulty can be a deterrent to farmers and ranchers from applying for such grants. Grant specialists in the Department of Agriculture help our local farmers and ranchers gain access to federal funding that may be available to help them increase capacity and help the state reach its goal of increasing local food production and reducing our reliance on imports. The current grant writer has been instrumental in seeking out potential funding for agricultural industries, gathering data from producers, and has already secured funding for the Department. This is a position that will provide a large return on investment for the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity.

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





**EAST OAHU COUNTY FARM BUREAU**  
**910 CALIFORNIA AVE., WAHIAWA, HI 96786**

February 24, 2026

Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair, and Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
State Capitol, 415 S. Beretania St.  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

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

The East O'ahu County Farm Bureau, which represents approximately 420 farmers and supporters of agriculture from Waimanalo to Kahuku, **strongly supports SB 2319 SD1**, "Relating to the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity," which would provide funding for a permanent grant writer position within HDAB.

Federal and private grant funds are often available to assist farmers and ranchers with production-related research, small equipment purchases, technological upgrades, environmental improvements, value-added product development, and many other activities that support improved productivity and profitability while reducing environmental impact. Most farms and many ranches in Hawai'i are relatively small; they cannot always fund these activities internally, and would have trouble identifying grant sources and completing grant applications. A full-time grant writer within HDAB will help Hawai'i's agricultural community compete for these valuable resources. We therefore hope that your Committee will support Hawai'i's agriculture by passing SB 2319 SD1.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter of great importance to Hawai'i's farmers and ranchers.

Sincerely,

Frederick M. Mencher  
for Grant Hamachi, President  
East O'ahu County Farm Bureau

**SB-2319-SD-1**

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 7:04:32 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**STRONG SUPPORT!!!**

**SB-2319-SD-1**

Submitted on: 2/23/2026 8:42:42 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support

2319 SB RELATING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY

**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
Governor

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
Lt. Governor



**SHARON HURD**  
Chairperson  
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

**DEAN M. MATSUKAWA**  
Deputy to the Chairperson

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

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

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2026  
10:55 AM  
CONFERENCE ROOM 211**

**SENATE BILL NO. 2319, SD1  
RELATING TO THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 2319, SD1 that appropriates funds for the grant writer position within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity and makes the position permanent. The Department strongly supports the bill and offers comments.

Federal grants are a key resource for support of Hawaii agriculture and fills agricultural need gaps without having to rely solely on state funding or loan borrowings which need to be repaid. Federal grants have been used to purchase processing equipment which has allowed increased agricultural production and resulted in new value-added products or refrigeration units that increase self-life of agricultural products and maintain cold chains.

The grant writer position was converted to a permanent position by Act 250, Session Laws of Hawaii 2025, however for the 2026-2027 fiscal year general funds were not provided and adequate funding for the position remains uncertain. This position has brought in \$8.89 million in federal grants to Hawaii this year despite the fact that many federal grant opportunities were being lost. The position is also available to work with divisions within the department in applying for grants that provide direct program support. The position is a good investment for the state and should be properly funded through the use of general funds.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

**SB-2319-SD-1**

Submitted on: 2/24/2026 11:22:48 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/25/2026 10:55:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Randy Cabral	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support