

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
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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 AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2026
3:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224**

**SENATE BILL NO. 2323
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 2323 that establishes within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (Department) the Farmland Transition Commission to examine barriers experienced by existing or prospective farmers of 25 to 40 years of age seeking to purchase or access farmland and provide recommendations on possible incentives or policies to assist these individuals in purchasing or accessing farmland. An annual report to the Legislature is required from 2027 through 2032. The Department appreciates the intent of this measure and offers comments.

The Department's waitlist for agricultural park lots is an indication of the demand by prospective and current farmers seeking affordable agricultural land with sufficient irrigation water supply. Farmers seeking fee-purchase of agricultural land may be thwarted by private land prices reflecting rural residential lifestyle rather than production agriculture. Farmers seeking non-fee agricultural land may find unsupportable land rents and tenure too short to allow farm-related investment.

The purpose of the proposed Farmland Transition Commission (minimum ten members, statewide) is to make recommendations on possible incentives or policies to assist these individuals in purchasing or accessing farmland. To increase the likelihood that the Commission performs as described in the measure, the Department suggests that data and information gathering and assemblage of relevant existing statutory and policy guidance should occur before the Commission is established. This preparatory work will take an unknown amount of time. Also, the Department believes the 25- to 40-year age limit be reconsidered to allow support for prospective and current farmers of all ages.

We note the measure relies on the Department to provide “administrative and other support” to the Commission (Bill, page 3, lines 6-7) and allows Commission members to be reimbursed for “reasonable expenses”, however there is no appropriation to allow this and the ability for the Department to acquire the services of relevant consultants and associated costs, as necessary.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

Legislative Testimony

Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
Wednesday, February 4, 2026 at 3:00 p.m.

By

Parwinder Grewal, Dean
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience
and
Vassilis Syrmos, PhD
Interim Provost
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

SB 2323 – RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony offering comments on SB 2323 which establishes the Farmland Transition Commission to examine barriers certain farmers face when trying to purchase or access farmland and provide recommendations on possible incentives or policies to assist these individuals in purchasing or accessing farmland.

We respectfully offer the following comments that College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience (CTAHR) is recognized as a member of the proposed farmland transition commission. CTAHR is aware of the challenges Hawai'i farmers face concerning access to affordable and suitable land, adequate and affordable water, and road and utility infrastructure. As Hawai'i strives to increase food security within the islands, having accurate data on barriers certain farmers face will support increasing Hawai'i's agricultural production and decreasing the cost of production to achieving greater food self-sufficiency. In regards to resources required for administrative and other support to the commission, CTAHR defers to the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.



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Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Senate Agriculture and Environment 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 SB2323.**

SB2323 establishes a Farmland Transition Commission within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB) to address the critical barrier of land access for Hawaii's next generation of food producers. High land costs and the transition of agricultural lands to "gentleman estates" or non-ag development remain the primary obstacles for smallholders. This commission is a vital step toward creating a formal pipeline for land transfer that prioritizes active agricultural use over speculative investment

To ensure the commission effectively serves the needs of beginning and family farmers, the following amendments are recommended:

Amendment 1: Composition of Commission The commission should include explicit representation from organizations representing smallholders and young farmers.

"SECTION 2. (b) The commission shall consist of the following members: ...

(10) Two representatives from statewide farmer organizations; and

(11) Two active farmers under the age of forty."

Amendment 2: Scope of Review The commission's mandate should include the examination of long-term agricultural easements and lease-to-fee conversion models specifically for small-scale producers.

"SECTION 2. (c) The commission shall: ...

(5) Examine the viability of state-funded agricultural conservation easements and lease-to-fee conversion programs to ensure permanent affordability for small-scale food producers; and

(6) Evaluate the effectiveness of current Agricultural Park and Non-Agricultural Park land lease terms in providing the equity and security necessary for young farmers to secure traditional financing."

SB2323 is essential for protecting the economic viability of the agricultural sector. Without a structured transition plan, Hawaii risks losing its remaining productive acreage to the real estate market, permanently undermining the state's biosecurity and

food sovereignty. HFU urges the committee to pass this measure with the suggested amendments to ensure the commission's work remains focused on the needs of diverse, small-scale family operations.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union



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February 4, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY ON SB 2323
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 provides comments on SB 2323, which establishes a Farmland Transition Commission to examine barriers faced by younger farmers in accessing and acquiring agricultural land.

We agree that access to farmland and generational transition are real and growing challenges in Hawai'i. High land costs, limited availability of farm-ready land, infrastructure constraints, and access to capital all make it difficult for new and next-generation farmers to enter or expand agricultural operations. These issues affect not only the long-term sustainability of agriculture, but also the State's broader goals related to food security and rural economic development.

At the same time, we respectfully question whether creating a new commission is the most effective mechanism to address these challenges. Many of the barriers identified in SB 2323 have been studied previously and are already well understood by farmers, policymakers, and existing agencies. HFB encourages the Legislature to ensure that any new effort builds on the work of existing entities and remains focused on identifying actionable solutions that can be implemented on the ground, rather than producing additional reports without clear pathways to implementation.

We also note the bill's focus on farmers between the ages of twenty-five and forty. While we understand the intent to support younger producers, farmland transition challenges are not limited to a single age group. Many farmers begin farming later in life, return to agriculture after working in other sectors, or expand operations in their forties and fifties.

We encourage consideration of a more inclusive approach that reflects the diverse paths into agriculture in Hawai'i.

If the Legislature chooses to move forward with a commission, HFB believes it is important that it be time-limited, coordinated with existing agricultural agencies and programs, and oriented toward practical outcomes that improve land access, succession planning, and farm viability across generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.



February 2nd, 2026

To: Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Chang, and the Senate Committee on Agriculture

Subject: **SB 2323, Relating to Agriculture**

Aloha,

I am submitting testimony in strong support of SB 2323, which establishes a Farmland Transition Commission to examine barriers to farmland access and develop recommendations for the Legislature.

Access to farmland is one of the most critical challenges facing Hawai'i's agricultural future. Many farmers, particularly beginning farmers and those rooted in local and Indigenous food traditions, face steep land costs, unclear succession pathways, and limited access to financing or long-term leases. These barriers make it difficult not only to start farming but to sustain agricultural operations across generations. SB 2323 takes an important step by creating a dedicated body to study these challenges comprehensively and propose coordinated, long-term solutions.

Farmland access is foundational to food security, community resilience, and environmental stewardship. When farmers can secure and care for land over the long term, local food production increases, rural economies are strengthened, and agricultural knowledge and practices can be passed on to future generations. By requiring reporting back to the Legislature, this bill ensures accountability and creates a pathway for informed, systems-level policy changes that support Hawai'i's agricultural communities and reduce reliance on imported food.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to pass SB 2323 out of committee.

Mahalo,

Carlin Rose McFadden

#fixourfoodsystem

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2026, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.

SB-2323

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 9:59:15 AM

Testimony for AEN on 2/4/2026 3:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Glen Kagamida | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

SUPPORT.