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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO AGRICULTURE.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1           SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the State's  
2 agricultural lands, watersheds, and working landscapes are  
3 essential to the State's long-term food security, climate  
4 resilience, and environmental health. Farmers and land stewards  
5 face persistent barriers to adopt conservation agricultural  
6 practices including limited access to technical assistance,  
7 underinvestment in farm-level conservation infrastructure, and a  
8 lack of coordinated statewide support for soil health,  
9 regenerative agriculture, and climate-smart stewardship.

10           The legislature further finds that although federal  
11 conservation programs provide important resources nationally,  
12 many of these programs were developed for large-scale,  
13 continental agricultural systems and do not align well with  
14 Hawaii's small, diversified farms or indigenous and community-  
15 based aina restoration practices. The United States Natural  
16 Resources Conservation Service's practice standards, timelines,  
17 and engineering requirements often reflect temperate-climate,



1 acreage-intensive farming models and can be difficult for the  
2 State's producers to access or implement within tropical  
3 agroecosystems, mixed land-tenure arrangements, and culturally  
4 grounded stewardship methods. As a result, Hawaii lacks a  
5 conservation agriculture support structure tailored to the  
6 State's unique ecological conditions, production systems, and  
7 aina-based restoration needs. While individual state-level  
8 programs currently offer elements of training, cost-share, and  
9 conservation support, Hawaii lacks a unified, statewide system  
10 that integrates conservation agriculture training, on-the-ground  
11 implementation, and infrastructure development. A coordinated  
12 statewide approach will strengthen environmental stewardship,  
13 expand local food production, reduce greenhouse gas emissions,  
14 improve soil and water health, and build long-term resilience in  
15 the State's food systems.

16 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to establish a  
17 conservation and agriculture environmental stewardship pilot  
18 program.

19 SECTION 2. (a) There is established within the department  
20 of agriculture and biosecurity a conservation and agriculture  
21 environmental stewardship pilot program to expand access to



1 funding and technical assistance for training incentives,  
2 infrastructure support, and cost-share incentives for farmers,  
3 ranchers, land managers, and conservation partners with the goal  
4 of supporting agricultural production.

5 (b) The pilot program shall include but not be limited to:

6 (1) Training incentives and capacity building that shall  
7 include:

8 (A) Small stipends for farmers and stewards who  
9 complete conservation and planning trainings; and

10 (B) Workshops on topics, including but not limited to  
11 soil health, climate-smart agriculture,  
12 agroforestry, composting, water conservation, and  
13 farm planning;

14 (2) Stewardship implementation cost-share that provides:

15 (A) Direct support for implementing conservation  
16 practices, including but not limited to cover  
17 cropping, soil amendments, erosion control,  
18 nutrient management, compost use, riparian  
19 buffers, and biodiversity improvement; and



1 (B) Cost-share availability to working farms,  
2 ranches, cooperatives, and community-based  
3 conservation partners; and

4 (3) Infrastructure development funding for small-scale  
5 conservation infrastructure, including but not limited  
6 to composting systems, improved irrigation efficiency,  
7 stormwater management features, equipment for soil  
8 health implementation, and other projects that advance  
9 regenerative practices.

10 (c) The department of agriculture and biosecurity may  
11 contract with or award grants to a nonprofit, or a consortium of  
12 nonprofits, with experience in administering statewide food  
13 systems funds and agriculture and conservation cost-share  
14 programs, and delivering conservation agriculture training and  
15 technical assistance.

16 (d) Eligible participants shall include Hawaii-based  
17 farmers, ranchers, producers, landowners, cooperatives,  
18 conservation organizations, community-based agriculture  
19 projects, and aina restoration and stewardship organizations.

20 (e) The department of agriculture and biosecurity may  
21 adopt rules pursuant to chapter 91, Hawaii Revised Statutes, to



1 establish procedures, eligibility requirements, evaluation  
2 criteria, reporting requirements, and other administrative  
3 provisions necessary to implement and administer grants awarded  
4 under this section. Applications for grants shall be submitted  
5 to the department of agriculture and biosecurity in a form and  
6 manner prescribed by the department. At a minimum, the  
7 applicant shall:

- 8 (1) Be licensed or accredited, in accordance with federal,  
9 state, or county statutes, regulations, rules, or  
10 ordinances, to conduct the activities or provide the  
11 services for which a grant is awarded;
- 12 (2) Provide a detailed plan outlining the scope,  
13 objectives, and projected impact of the proposed  
14 project and a clear breakdown of how grant funds will  
15 be used;
- 16 (3) Agree to use state funds exclusively for the purposes  
17 of the pilot program;
- 18 (4) Demonstrate the capability and capacity to properly  
19 carry out the proposed project and use the grant for  
20 the purposes of the pilot program;



- 1 (5) Comply with all applicable federal and state laws  
2 prohibiting discrimination against any person on the  
3 basis of race, color, national origin, religion,  
4 creed, sex, age, sexual orientation, disability, or  
5 any other characteristic protected under applicable  
6 federal or state law;
- 7 (6) Agree not to use state funds for purposes of  
8 entertainment or perquisites;
- 9 (7) Comply with any additional requirements as the  
10 department may prescribe;
- 11 (8) Comply with all applicable federal, state, and county  
12 statutes, regulations, rules, and ordinances;
- 13 (9) Agree to indemnify and save harmless the State of  
14 Hawaii and its officers, agents, and employees from  
15 and against any and all claims arising out of or  
16 resulting from activities carried out or projects  
17 undertaken with funds provided pursuant to this  
18 section and procure sufficient insurance to provide  
19 this indemnification if requested to do so by the  
20 department; and



1 (10) Agree to make available to the department all records  
2 the applicant may have relating to the grant, to allow  
3 state agencies to monitor the applicant's compliance  
4 with this section.

5 (f) The pilot program shall cease to exist on June 30,  
6 2028.

7 SECTION 3. The department of agriculture and biosecurity  
8 shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations,  
9 including any proposed legislation, to the legislature no later  
10 than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session  
11 of 2027, regarding the conservation and agriculture  
12 environmental stewardship pilot program, which shall include:

- 13 (1) The number and types of participants;
- 14 (2) Acres and areas impacted by conservation  
15 implementation;
- 16 (3) Types of conservation practices funded and completed;
- 17 (4) Environmental, social, and cultural outcomes,  
18 including soil health improvements, compost use, water  
19 efficiency, and other documented benefits, community  
20 participation, education, and awareness about  
21 conservation and agriculture; and



1 (5) Recommendations regarding expansion, modification, or  
2 continuation of the program.

3 SECTION 4. The department of agriculture and biosecurity  
4 may complete reporting requirements and close-out activities  
5 related to the conservation and agriculture environmental  
6 stewardship pilot program after the pilot program sunsets  
7 pursuant to subsection (f) of section 2 of this Act.

8 SECTION 5. There is appropriated out of the general  
9 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so  
10 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 to  
11 implement the conservation and agriculture environmental  
12 stewardship pilot program.

13 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the department of  
14 agriculture and biosecurity for the purposes of this Act.

15 SECTION 6. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2050.



**Report Title:**

DAB; Conservation and Agriculture Environmental Stewardship  
Pilot Program; Report; Appropriation

**Description:**

Establishes a two-year Conservation and Agriculture  
Environmental Stewardship Pilot Program within the Department of  
Agriculture and Biosecurity. Requires a report to the  
Legislature. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/2050. (SD1)

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not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

