

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 HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS**

**FEBRUARY 11, 2026
9:30 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 325 & VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**HOUSE BILL NO. 1602
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE**

Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 1602 that appropriates funds for a grant writer position within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB). The Department 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. The grant writer position brings expertise and knowledge to help farmers and ranchers successfully apply for grants to strengthen their operations. DAB currently has one full-time grant writer on staff who is able to assist the agricultural industry with complex grant applications and compliance requirements. DAB respectfully requests that the grant writer position be converted to a grant management specialist position to improve the grant capacity at DAB and to better assist the statewide agricultural industry.

Grant management includes funding, budget management, compliance, reporting and closing out of awards. Having a dedicated person to handle these responsibilities will allow the grant writer to fully concentrate on developing and writing grant proposals for farmers and ranchers as well as for DAB. The grant management specialist position will improve the overall grant capacity at DAB and allow the agricultural industry to secure additional resources that support agricultural production, infrastructure and biosecurity to improve Hawaii's food self-sufficiency.

Thank you for consideration of our request and the opportunity to testify.

HB-1602

Submitted on: 2/8/2026 1:15:30 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/11/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ronald Weidenbach	Hawaii Fish Company Inc.	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hawai'i Fish Company strongly supports this measure. The current DAB grant writer has proven the value of this position with the significant Federal grant funds that were secured for the program over the past year. This appears to be an approximate 80X return on the State's investment for this position to date. A great use of taxpayer money to increase DAB's total operating funds.



Email: communications@ulupono.com

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS
Wednesday, February 11, 2026 — 9:30 a.m.

Ulupono Initiative strongly supports HB 1602, Relating to Agriculture.

Dear Chair Chun 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 HB 1602, which appropriates funds for one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) grant writer position within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB).

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

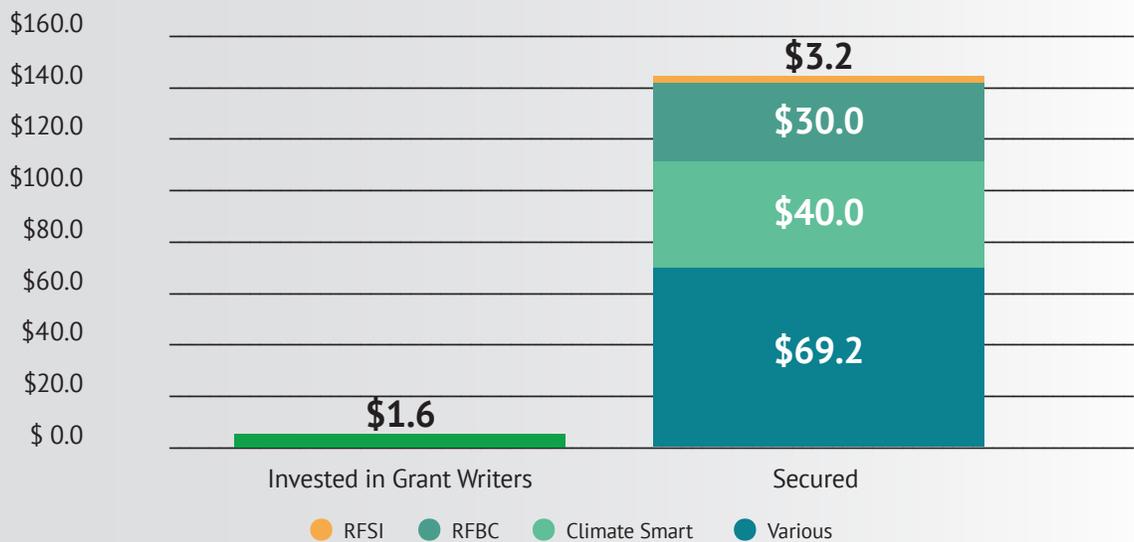


Other Benefits for the State

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.



COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS
Rep. Cory M. Chun, Chair
Rep. Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair

HB1602
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL GRANT ADMINISTRATION.

Wednesday, February 11, 2026, 9:30 AM
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference

Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **supports HB1602** 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





1050 Bishop St. PMB 235 |
Honolulu, HI 96813
P: 808-533-1292 | e:
info@hawaiiifood.com

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Jayson Watts, Mahi Pono, *Vice Chair*
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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 Agriculture and Food Systems
FROM: HAWAII FOOD INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION
Lauren Zirbel, Executive Director

DATE: February 11, 2026

TIME: 9:30am

RE: HB1602 Relating to Agriculture

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.



February 9, 2026

To: Chair Representative Cory Chun, Vice Chair Representative Matthias Kusch, and the members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems

Subject: **HB1602**, Relating to Agriculture

Aloha,

I am writing in **support** of **HB1602**. This measure allocates funds to the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB) for a full-time equivalent grant specialist position.

In the 2023 fiscal year, Hawai'i has received approximately \$2.3 billion in federal grants, \$97.6 million of which went towards agriculture and climate resilience efforts such as conservation and 'āina restoration¹. It is also estimated that 87% of all farms in Hawai'i make less than \$50,000 annually, contributing to only 10% of total sales². This goes to show that most local farms are not typical for-profit commercial businesses that depend— at least partially— on external funding such as grants.

Adequate funding is essential for the success of our local farms, but can prove difficult to secure through the often complex grant application processes. Additionally, we acknowledge that our farmers are an aging population; being made aware of the grants that are available and applying for them can be difficult without assistance. A grant specialist position can help such ones receive the financial support they need.

I urge this committee to pass HB1602, which will help our farmers secure the funding they depend on to feed themselves and our communities.

Mahalo,
Sydney Haas & the Food+ Policy Team
#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.

¹ *Federal funds*. (n.d.). Governor Josh Green, M.D. Retrieved February 9, 2026, from <https://governor.hawaii.gov/federal-funds/>

² State of Hawaii Department of Agriculture. (2020). *Profile of Hawaii Agriculture - Marketing Farms by Annual Sales and Sales Class, 2017*. https://dab.hawaii.gov/add/files/2020/06/Farms-by-Sales-Class-2017_SOH_06.01.20.pdf



P.O. Box 253, Kunia, Hawai'i 96759
Phone: (808) 848-2074; Fax: (808) 848-1921
e-mail info@hfbf.org; www.hfbf.org

February 11, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

TESTIMONY ON HB 1602
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Conference Room 325 & Videoconference
9:30 AM

Aloha Chair Chun, Vice-Chair Kusch, 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 HB 1602, 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.

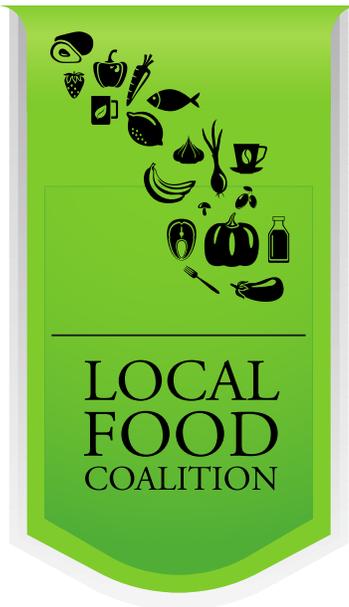
As direct federal appropriations for agriculture continue to decline, state agencies and agricultural stakeholders have become increasingly reliant on competitive federal and private grant programs. Successfully accessing these funds requires specialized expertise, long-term continuity, and the ability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

We supported similar legislation last year to establish grant specialist capacity within DAB. HB 1602 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.

HB 1602 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.



Hawai'i Aquaculture & Aquaponics Association
Hawai'i Cattlemen's Council
Hawai'i Farm Bureau Federation
Hawai'i Farmers' Union United
Hawai'i Food Industry Association
Hawai'i Food Manufacturers Association
Kohala Center
Land Use Research Foundation of Hawai'i
Maui Farm to School Network (Maui F2SN)
Ulupono Initiative
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resilience - University of Hawai'i at Manoa

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
Wednesday, February 11, 2026 – 9:30 a.m.
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference

HB 1602 – RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

SUPPORT

Aloha Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee:

The Local Food Coalition supports HB 1602, 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.

Access to competitive grants, particularly federal agricultural funding opportunities, represents one of the most effective ways the State can leverage external resources to strengthen Hawaii's agricultural sector. However, the process of identifying, writing, and managing grants is often complex and time-intensive.

By establishing a permanent, dedicated grant writer, the Department will be better equipped to assist local farmers, ranchers, and producers in accessing competitive federal, state, county, and private funding sources. This position will also provide continuity, institutional knowledge, and consistent outreach across multiple grant cycles—benefits that are difficult to sustain with temporary or contract-based staffing.

The Local Food Coalition is an organization comprised of farmers, ranchers, livestock producers, investors, and other stakeholders united by a shared commitment to building a robust and self-sufficient food system for Hawai'i.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

HB-1602

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 8:33:59 AM

Testimony for AGR on 2/11/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Megan Blazak	Hilo County Farm Bureau	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Honorable Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee,

As the chapter president of the Hilo County Farm Bureau, I write in strong support of the proposed measure on behalf of our Board of Directors and our members.

The privately-funded pilot program for grant writing support in HDAB has proven effective with a significant return on investment in the form of federal grant dollars secured for the state's agricultural sector. Funding a permanent position at HDAB for the dedicated purpose of grant writing will directly benefit local farmers and ranchers.

For these reasons, Hilo County Farm Bureau urges you to pass this measure. Thank you.

HB-1602

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 8:34:18 AM

Testimony for AGR on 2/11/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Warren Watanabe	Maui County Farm Bureau	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

The Maui County Farm Bureau supports HB1602, Appropriation for one FTE grant specialist position within the DAB.



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

February 10, 2026

LATE

Representative Cory M. Chun, Chair, and Representative Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair
House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems
State Capitol, 415 S. Beretania St.
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, 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 HB 1602**, "Relating to Agriculture," 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 HB 1602.

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



P.O. Box 1069
Hanapepe, HI 96716-1069
808-343-8196
www.NSEVP.org

February 10, 2026

HB 1602 — DAB Grant Writer Position

Appropriates funds to establish one full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) grant specialist position within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity.

POSITION: SUPPORT

Aloha Chair and Members,

North Shore EVP supports HB 1602, which makes a grant writer position within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity permanent.

As federal funding becomes increasingly competitive, dedicated and experienced staff to pursue and successfully manage grants are essential. This position will help ensure Hawai'i can effectively access federal resources that support farmers, ranchers, and agricultural infrastructure statewide. Recent reductions in federal funding opportunities, particularly those available to nonprofit entities, such as the Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant, make it even more important to invest in grant-writing capacity within the State's Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity. In addition, this position would strengthen public and private partnerships across the state, which can accelerate project development and implementation, a critical need for supporting the agricultural sector.

Investing in grant capacity is a strategic and cost effective approach that can leverage significantly more federal funding than the cost of the position itself, while delivering resources for Hawai'i's agricultural sector.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 1602.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa Rhoden, Executive Director

North Shore EVP, Hawai'i GroupGAP

HB-1602

Submitted on: 2/9/2026 3:05:22 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/11/2026 9:30:00 AM

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

Comments:

STRONG SUPPORT!!!

LATE

HB-1602

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 9:38:40 AM

Testimony for AGR on 2/11/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaelin Sylva	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

HB 1602 – Relating to Agriculture

Position: Support

Aloha Chair Chun, Vice-Chair Kusch, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Kaelin Sylva, and I am an agricultural supporter from Oahu.

I support HB 1602, which makes a grant writer position within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB) permanent.

As federal funding becomes more competitive, having dedicated, experienced staff to pursue and manage grants is essential. This position helps ensure that Hawai‘i can access additional capital to support farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural producers.

Investing in DAB’s grant capacity would allow for the state to bring outside capital and resources to Hawai‘i’s agricultural industry.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 1602.

LATE

HB-1602

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 2:26:29 PM
Testimony for AGR on 2/11/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mark Phillipson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members

Please support this important FTE headcount. Very worthwhile position

Mahalo for your support

LATE

HB-1602

Submitted on: 2/10/2026 2:49:19 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/11/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Randy Cabral	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Strong support