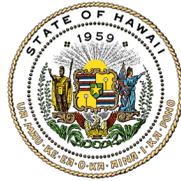


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

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 AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

**MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2026
3:05 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224**

**HOUSE BILL NO. 1603, HOUSE DRAFT 1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL PARK LEASES**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 1603, House Draft 1. This bill repeals the requirement for land covered by an agricultural park lease with a remaining term of 15 years or less to be located in a county having a population of less than 500,000 in order for the Department to extend the lease. The Department respectfully offers comments.

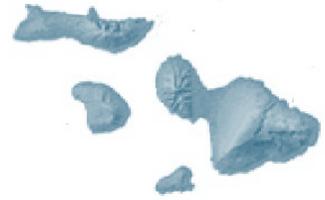
In the 2023 Session, the legislature passed House Bill 307, House Draft 1, Senate Draft 1, Conference Draft 1, which was signed into law as Act 213 on July 5, 2023. Act 213 allows the Department to extend agricultural park leases with remaining terms of fifteen years or less in any county with a population of 500,000 or less, provided the lease area is 25 acres or less. In effect, Act 213 authorizes lease extensions in all agricultural parks managed by the Department with the exception of those located on Oahu. House Bill 1603 appears to be intended to remove Act 213's restriction on the extension of Oahu agricultural park leases.

Existing agricultural park lessees generally advocate for the Department to be given broad authority to grant lease extensions. Such extensions allow them to make long-term plans for continued operations with new investments in their leasehold improvements and facilities. At the same time, persons on the Department's waitlist for agricultural lands would likely prefer that upon the expiration of existing lease terms, State lands be made available for lease to qualified farmers through a competitive process. The Department recognizes merit in both positions.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

RICHARD T. BISSEN, JR.
Mayor

JOSIAH K. NISHITA
Managing Director



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
COUNTY OF MAUI
200 SOUTH HIGH STREET
WAILUKU, MAUI, HAWAII 96793
www.mauicounty.gov

TO: Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair
Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair
Committee on Agriculture and Environment

FROM: Richard T. Bissen, Jr., Mayor
Rogerene Arce, Director of Agriculture

DATE: March 2, 2026

SUBJECT: **SUPPORT OF HB1603 HD1, RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL PARK**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **SUPPORT** of this important measure.

The Act repeals the requirement for land covered by an agricultural park lease with a remaining term of fifteen years or less to be located in a county having a population of less than five hundred thousand in order for the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to extend the lease. Effective 7/1/3000.

We **SUPPORT** this measure for the following reasons:

1. HB1603 strengthens local food security by allowing the Department of Agriculture to extend agricultural park leases, giving farmers the long-term land tenure they need to invest in soil health, infrastructure, and consistent production for island communities.
2. HB1603 promotes fairness and equity for farmers by giving them lease-extension opportunities, helping family farms stay viable despite intense development pressure and rising land costs.
3. HB1603 supports economic stability in the agricultural sector by encouraging long-term, affordable leases that make it feasible for farmers to upgrade irrigation, expand operations, and maintain local jobs tied to diversified agriculture rather than short-term land speculation.

Mahalo for your consideration.



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

March 16, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY ON HB 1603, HD1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL PARK LEASES

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
3:05 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 strongly supports HB 1603, HD1, which addresses one of the most significant barriers to agricultural productivity on state lands: lease term uncertainty for farmers operating in agricultural parks.

Agricultural parks can and should support new and beginning farmers, but they must also support existing farmers with a proven track record of production. These farmers are currently producing Hawai'i's food, feed, fiber, fuel, and floriculture, and many have made substantial investments in their Ag Park operations. Farmers with short remaining lease terms may be discouraged from continued investment, restricted from accessing financing, and placed at risk of closure.

Lease certainty is essential for agricultural viability. Lenders routinely consider the remaining lease term when evaluating loan applications, and farmers with limited lease horizons are often unable to secure financing for their farm operations. By allowing lease extensions, HB 1603, HD1 encourages long-term planning, investment, and increased agricultural production on state lands.

While concerns are sometimes raised about waitlists for agricultural park leases, HFB believes the long-term solution is to increase the supply of agricultural park parcels rather than displacing productive, established farmers. Expanding agricultural park capacity by acquiring suitable private agricultural land and developing new or expanded parks, similar to the Kunia Agricultural Park, would create more opportunities for new and beginning farmers while preserving existing production. HB 1603, HD1 supports this balanced

approach by maintaining agricultural productivity today while allowing the State to pursue strategies that expand access to agricultural lands over time.

HFB also emphasizes that lease extensions under HB 1603, HD1 are discretionary, not automatic. The Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity retains the authority to approve or deny extensions and to enforce lease terms to ensure bona fide agricultural use. This approach balances accountability with the need to support productive farming operations.

HFB respectfully suggests a modest amendment to remove the twenty-five-acre eligibility threshold. Many agricultural park tenants operate on parcels larger than twenty-five acres and face the same financing, infrastructure investment, and long-term planning challenges that this bill seeks to address. Limiting eligibility to parcels of twenty-five acres or less would unintentionally exclude the majority of agricultural park tenants, estimated to be nearly ninety percent of existing leases, from the very relief this measure is intended to provide. Allowing all agricultural park leases to be eligible for extension, while maintaining the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity's discretion to approve or deny extensions based on compliance and bona fide agricultural use, would create a more equitable policy and better support the productive farmers currently operating in Hawai'i's agricultural parks.

HB 1603, HD1 represents a practical policy solution that encourages investment, protects existing agricultural production, and supports the State's goals of increasing local food production and strengthening food security. HFB respectfully urges your support.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



AHIKI ACRES

March 16, 2026

Re: HB1603, HD1, Relating To Agricultural Park Leases

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment,

My name is Haley McKinnon, and I am writing on behalf of Ahiki Acres, LLC in strong support of House Bill 1603. This bill repeals the requirement that land covered by an agricultural park lease with a remaining term of fifteen years or less must be located in a county having a population of fewer than five hundred thousand in order for the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to extend the lease.

Ahiki Acres is a 6-acre diversified vegetable farm located in Waimānalo, Hawai'i. Since 2019, we have been providing fresh, high quality produce to the island of O'ahu. To meet growing community demand, in 2022 we acquired a 5.77-acre, 20-year agricultural lease from the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity. Neither my partner nor I come from an agricultural background beyond our training with GoFarm Hawai'i. Through education, mentorship, and years of hands-on work, we have built a viable farm business that currently generates approximately \$250,000 in annual revenue while contributing to local food security.

Despite this progress, securing and maintaining an agricultural lease has been an arduous and uncertain process. As a young farmer (29 years old), I am deeply concerned about the long-term future of our farm. We have already invested more than \$300,000 into our leased land, including essential infrastructure and significant soil rehabilitation. However, when our lease expires in November 2042, we currently have no option to extend it. The land would instead return to the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity and be put out to bid to the highest bidder, placing our farm's future at risk despite decades of stewardship and investment.

While Act 213, passed in 2023, created a pathway for agricultural park lease extensions, it excluded counties with populations over five hundred thousand, effectively disqualifying O'ahu. This exclusion disproportionately impacts farmers on the island who face higher land costs, greater development pressure, and limited access to agricultural land.

House Bill 1603 would correct this inequity. All we are asking for is fairness across counties and the opportunity to continue farming, investing in our land, and providing food for our community for generations to come.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Haley McKinnon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Haley Kaukea Eiko McKinnon
Co-Owner
Ahiki Acres, LLC



PO Box 42
Waimanalo, HI 96795-0042
<http://waimanaloag.com>

Waimanalo Agricultural Association

March 16, 2026

**Testimony in Support of HB 1603, HD1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL PARK LEASES**

House Committee on Agriculture and Environment
Monday, March 16, 2026 at 3:05 p.m.
Via Video Conference and CR 325

Dear Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards and Committee Members,

The Waimanalo Agricultural Association (WAA) is writing in **strong support of HB 1603, HD1, Relating to Agricultural Park Leases**. WAA was originally formed in 1995 to address agricultural theft in Waimanalo and has since grown to represent agribusiness in Waimanalo, including plant nurseries, flower and turfgrass farms, growers of fruit and vegetables, equestrian ranches, and distributors of agricultural supplies. WAA is dedicated to the preservation and perpetuation of agriculture in Waimanalo.

HB 1603, HD1 proposes allowing a lessee of an existing agricultural park lease the ability to extend their leases if they have fifteen years or less remaining. This bill will bring parity to what was extended to the neighbor island agricultural park leases in 2023 under Act 213. In the Committee Report for Act 213 (2023) by the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment said,

Your committee finds that agricultural park leases are structured to advance agriculture in the State and that long-term leases make it possible for farmers and ranchers to prudently invest in operational and infrastructure improvements on leased lands. **Your Committee further finds that when faced with the uncertainty of continued tenancy, lessees have little incentive to make major investments or improvements to their infrastructure or ensure the long-term maintenance of their facilities, which may deteriorate as a result.** Thus, this measure allows the Department of Agriculture to extend certain leases with a remaining term of fifteen years or less to encourage further investment and production on agricultural park lands. *Emphasis added.* [S. Comm. on Agriculture and Environment, HB 307, HD1, 32nd Leg., \(Haw. 2023\)](#)

Waimanalo is one of the most close-knit agricultural communities that continues to thrive and contribute to the agricultural diversity of the State's economy. The passage of this measure will bring additional long-term investment into the farmer's agricultural operations. As noted in the 2023 committee report above, a longer lease for a farmer would increase the chances of a financial institution granting an agricultural loan. This measure will have a profound impact on Oahu's agricultural parks, which make up more than 500 acres of agriculturally zone lands. The Waimanalo Agricultural Park is comprised of smaller lots for a total 126 acres and this measure.

Waimanalo Agricultural Association requests that you pass HB 1603, HD1 to allow Oahu farmers the ability to secure a more viable future for their agricultural operations and continue to contribute to the state's economy. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support.



Officers

Kaipo Kekona
State President

Christian Zuckerman
Vice-President

Maureen Datta
Secretary

Reba Lopez
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Chapter Presidents

Kelii Gannet
Kohala, Hawai'i

East Hawai'i

Puna, Hawai'i

Ka'ū, Hawai'i

Maureen Datta
Kona, Hawai'i

Gina Lind
Hāna, Maui

Mason Scharer
Haleakalā, Maui

Kaiea Medeiros
Mauna Kahālāwai,
Maui

Kaipo Kekona
Lahaina, Maui

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 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 HB1603.**

HB1603 offers equitable conditions for farmers across Hawaii by enabling lease extensions for agricultural park lands, irrespective of the population of the county where the land is located. This is particularly important in larger, more populated counties where farmers face significant competition for land resources. By removing the population-based restriction, HB1603 ensures that farmers in all regions have the same ability to secure long-term access to agricultural lands, fostering stability and promoting agricultural sustainability across the state.

When farmers have the assurance of long-term land tenure, they are incentivized to invest in sustainable practices and infrastructure improvements that enhance productivity while preserving environmental quality. This bill not only supports the economic viability of individual farming operations but also contributes to the overall resilience and competitiveness of Hawaii's agricultural community. The enactment of HB1603 would provide farmers the confidence to make decisions that benefit their businesses, local communities, and the state's agricultural future.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union

HB-1603-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 12:54:15 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/16/2026 3:05:00 PM

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

Comments:

Honorable Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and members of the Committee,

Hilo County Farm Bureau supports HB 1603, HD1, which allows lease extensions for farmers operating in State agricultural parks on O'ahu. Under existing law, lease extensions are limited to counties with populations under 500,000. This means farmers operating in State agricultural parks on O'ahu are excluded from the same lease extension opportunities already available to farmers on the neighbor islands. HB 1603, HD1 removes that population restriction so farmers across the state are treated equally.

Lease certainty is critical for farmers. When leases are nearing expiration, it becomes difficult to invest in infrastructure, plant long-term crops, or secure financing. This measure will provide the stability farmers need to plan, invest, and continue producing food. Allowing lease extensions statewide will directly support existing agricultural operations in State agricultural parks and helps maintain local agricultural production across Hawai'i.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

Megan Blazak
Chapter President
Hilo County Farm Bureau



**THE SENATE
KA 'AHA KENEKOA
THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION OF 2026**

**COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair
Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair**

**Monday, March 16, 2026 3:05 PM
Conference Room 224
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street**

RE: HB1603 HD1 RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL PARK LEASES

My name is Eric S. Tanouye and I am the President for the Hawaii Floriculture and Nursery Association. HFNA is a statewide umbrella organization with approximately 350 members. Our membership is made up with breeders, hybridizers, propagators, growers, shippers, wholesalers, retailers, educators, and the allied industry, which supports our efforts in agriculture.

The Hawaii Floriculture and Nursery Association (HFNA) **STRONGLY SUPPORTS House Bill 1603 HD1** which repeals the requirement for land covered by an agricultural park lease with a remaining term of fifteen years or less to be located in a county having a population of less than five hundred thousand in order for the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity.

We want to see our growers and producers of our industry receive help and have future growers have the ability to enter the industry as a viable business option. We are currently experiencing an "aging farmer" problem and we need to plan to help new growers and farmers enter agriculture.

We are requesting an increase to the cap of 25 acres to up to 60 acres. We understand that there are leases that are larger than 25 acres and we feel if we want to really assist our farmers, ranchers, and nurserymen and women, increasing the limit up to 60 acres would include lots that may need these lease extensions.

We ask that you support our industry and agriculture, so that we may continue to bring the beauty of Hawaii to others through flowers and ornamentals.



If you have any questions at this time, I would be happy to discuss them and can be reached by phone at 808-959-3535 ext 2627, cell 960-1433 and email eric@greenpointnursery.com.

Supporting Agriculture and Hawaii,



Eric S. Tanouye
President
Hawaii Floriculture and Nursery Association



EAST OAHU COUNTY FARM BUREAU

910 CALIFORNIA AVE., WAHIAWA, HI 96786

March 14, 2026

Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair, and Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment
State Capitol, 415 S. Beretania St.
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, 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 1603 HD1**, "Relating to Agricultural Park Leases," which would allow O'ahu farmers to extend agricultural park leases with a remaining term of 15 years or less.

O'ahu has many small to medium-sized farms, including ones in State agricultural parks. To remain productive, especially in this time of technological change, farms need frequent investment in infrastructure and equipment. If farmers aren't sure that their farms will continue, they will be discouraged from making the necessary long-term investments. We therefore urge your Committee to pass HB 1603 HD1. We further suggest that the 25-acre limit be increased to 35 acres so that more medium-scale farmers can access the bill's benefits.

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

HB-1603-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2026 7:49:11 AM

Testimony for AEN on 3/16/2026 3:05:00 PM

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

Comments:

The Maui County Farm Bureau supports HB1603 HD1, Relating to Agricultural Park Leases.

HB-1603-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2026 2:01:50 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/16/2026 3:05:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

Am in support of this bill.

Mark Phillipson

HB-1603-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2026 11:08:25 AM

Testimony for AEN on 3/16/2026 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sara G Moore	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support **HB 1603, HD1**.

Under existing law, lease extensions are effectively limited to counties with populations under 500,000. This means farmers operating in State agricultural parks on O‘ahu are excluded from the same lease extension opportunities already available to farmers on the neighbor islands. HB 1603, HD1 removes that population restriction so farmers across the state are treated equally.

Lease certainty is critical for farmers. When leases are nearing expiration, it becomes difficult to invest in infrastructure, plant long-term crops, or secure financing. Allowing earlier lease extensions provides the stability farmers need to plan, invest, and continue producing food.

Providing this option statewide supports existing agricultural operations and helps maintain local agricultural production across Hawai‘i.

Mahalo

HB-1603-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2026 10:34:30 AM

Testimony for AEN on 3/16/2026 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Janet Ashman	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please pass HB 1603, HD1.

As a matter of fairness, agricultural park lease extensions should be allowed on O‘ahu as they are on neighbor islands.

Without the opportunity of an extended lease, farmers nearing the end of their lease term may find it impossible to invest in infrastructure, plant crops, or secure financing.

Passage of this bill may be critical to O‘ahu's ability to continue to produce food. Thank you.

HB-1603-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/16/2026 5:40:40 AM

Testimony for AEN on 3/16/2026 3:05:00 PM

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

Comments:

Support

HB-1603-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2026 5:43:32 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/16/2026 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jason Moniz	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testifying in support of this Bill.