

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



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 HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND

**Tuesday, February 17, 2026
9:00 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 411**

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

Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa 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.

Testimony of Sharon Hurd

February 17, 2026

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Extending the lease of a successfully operating agricultural operation makes sense as it supports the Department goal to double food production. Developing more agricultural parks would accommodate those on the waitlist for agricultural lands and support increased food production. Both extending leases and providing more land for food production will Nourish Hawaii's Future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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February 17, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON WATER & LAND

TESTIMONY ON HB 1603, HD1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL PARK LEASES

Conference Room 411 & Videoconference
9:00 AM

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice-Chair Morikawa, 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 expand eligibility from agricultural leases of twenty-five acres or less to thirty-five acres or less. Many family farming operations in Hawai'i operate within this range and face the same challenges related to financing, infrastructure investment, and long-term planning that this bill seeks to address. Expanding the acreage threshold would better reflect agricultural realities while remaining consistent with the bill's intent to support bona fide farmers.

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

February 17, 2026

Re: HB1603, Relating To Agricultural Park Leases

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and members of the House Committee on Water and Land,

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 to communities across O'ahu. In 2022 we acquired a 5.77-acre, 20-year agricultural lease from the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity.

Over the past several years, we have invested more than \$300,000 into our leased land, including essential infrastructure and significant soil rehabilitation. These investments reflect not only financial commitment, but a long-term dedication to responsible land stewardship. 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.

HB1603 corrects this inequity. It does not guarantee lease extensions, but simply restores fairness across counties and allows O'ahu farmers the same opportunity to seek long-term stability. Providing a reasonable pathway for lease extension incentivizes continued investment in soil health, infrastructure, and resource conservation.

Mahalo for your time and consideration, and for your continued support of Hawai'i's farmers.

Sincerely,

Haley Kaukea Eiko McKinnon
Co-Owner
Ahiki Acres, LLC

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State President



Christian Zuckerman
Vice-President

Maureen Datta
Secretary

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Lana'i

India Clark
North Shore, Oahu

Christian Zuckerman
Wai'anae, Oahu

Rachel LaDrig
Waimanalo, Oahu

Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, Oahu

Natalie Urminska
Kauai

Aloha Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa, and Members of the House Water & Land Committee,

The Hawaii 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
Hawaii Farmers Union



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February 17th, 2026

Aloha e Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Morikawa and Members of the Committee on Water and Land,

Re: Testimony in Support of HB1603 HD1, Relating To Agricultural Park Leases

Please accept this testimony in **strong support of HB1603. This bill would bring consistency to ag park leases throughout the islands** and is a first step in broader efforts to update, streamline and improve affordable access to agricultural land, water and infrastructure.

Agriculture Stewardship Hawai'i is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the viability and sustainability of Hawai'i's farmers and ranchers through technical assistance, resource coordination, business education, and policy support. In our day-to-day work with producers across the state, we hear a clear and urgent need for more affordable access to agricultural land, water and infrastructure and consistency in public ag park lease terms. We also hear **frustrations that state ag park leases go to the highest bidder, without due consideration for how well resources are stewarded on the land.**

Farmers often make significant investments in soil health, infrastructure, and community food systems, yet short-lease terms across the islands put farmers at risk of losing access to the land they've stewarded and **discourage long-term investments.** Hawai'i's agricultural lands are deeply interconnected with our watershed systems, soil health, groundwater recharge, and long-term resource stewardship. Ensuring these lands remain actively and responsibly managed is critical to protecting downstream water quality, reducing erosion, and maintaining the ecological function of our landscapes.

This measure advances much-needed alignment in agricultural park leasing policies statewide. By enabling O'ahu farmers to apply for extended lease terms, the bill provides more options for meaningful investment in soil health, water management, and responsible stewardship.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Warm wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amanda Shaw".

Dr. Amanda Shaw, PhD, Statewide Food Systems Coordinator
Email: amanda@agstewardshiphawaii.org, Tel: 808 429 5310

HB-1603-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 3:59:18 PM

Testimony for WAL on 2/17/2026 9:00:00 AM

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

Comments:

SUPPORT