

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND PERMITTING
KA 'OIHANA HO'OLĀLĀ A ME NĀ PALAPALA 'AE
CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

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BRYAN GALLAGHER, P.E.
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2ND DEPUTY DIRECTOR
HOPE PO'O KUALUA

TESTIMONY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND PERMITTING
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

February 18, 2026
Conference Room 325

TO: The Honorable Cory M. Chun, Chair, The Honorable Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair,
and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture & Food Systems

RE: COMMENTS ON HOUSE BILL NO. 1737, HD 1, RELATING TO
FARM EMPLOYEE HOUSING

The Department of Planning and Permitting (DPP) **offers comments** on House Bill No. 1737 HD1, which amends § 205-2 and § 205-4.5 by clarifying the permitted uses within the agriculture district with respect to farm dwellings and farm employee housing.

While the City is in favor of efforts to support our agricultural industry by allowing flexibility for various forms of housing for farm workers, allowing multi-family dwellings, i.e., an apartment building, without safeguards in place is not in keeping with the desired character and intent of the agricultural district. We note that the amendments to § 205-4.5 appear to be largely consistent with the new farm worker housing use that was added to the City's Land Use Ordinance (LUO) (Revised Ordinances of Honolulu, Chapter 21) under Ordinance 25-2. We also appreciate that the Bill prohibits separating ownership through a condominium property regime and using the farm dwellings for agricultural tourism and as transient vacation rentals.

Specifically, the LUO states that farm worker housing may be composed of multiple single-unit, two-unit, or multi-unit dwellings; one employee and the employee's family or up to three unrelated employees may share one dwelling unit; each dwelling unit must not exceed 800 square feet of floor area; and no more than eight dwelling units are allowed in any multi-unit dwelling. The latter is the main difference with the proposed Bill – the LUO provision puts a maximum number of units per structure at eight units, rather than placing a maximum ratio of square feet of agricultural-related structures per acre of agricultural land. We note that this ratio is undetermined in the

The Honorable Cory M. Chun, Chair
and Members of the Committee on Agriculture & Food Systems
Hawai'i House of Representatives
House Bill No. 1737, HD 1
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Page 2

proposed Bill, and may not be the most appropriate measure since it does not align with the City's zoning regulations.

In summary, we recommend that amendments to Chapter 205 be broad enough to allow consistency with each county's zoning code, without creating conflicting language. The State should provide deference to the counties' localized experience and expertise to ensure that the farm worker housing is justified and, as such, allow the counties to implement further safeguards by requiring a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to ensure bona fide farm worker housing in the agricultural districts.

We respectfully offer these comments on House Bill No. 1737, HD1, and request that it be held in committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Very truly yours,



Dawn Takeuchi Apuna
Director

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
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Phone: (808) 973-9560 FAX: (808) 973-9613

**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE**

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEES ON HOUSING AND WATER AND LAND

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2026
8:45 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 430**

**HOUSE BILL NO.1737
RELATING TO FARM EMPLOYEE HOUSING**

Chairs Evslin and Hashem, Vice Chairs Miyake and Morikawa and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 1737 that clarifies that a "farm dwelling" permitted in an agricultural district includes a single-family farm dwelling with an accessory employee housing structure, subject to certain restrictions. The Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (Department) has concerns.

The Department notes that this measure appears to make the accessory employee housing structure accessory to the farm dwelling rather than to the farm itself. We are uncertain what affect this will have on other statutes and county zoning ordinances. This bill redefines "farm dwelling" from a "single-family" dwelling to a "residential" dwelling located on and accessory to a farm (page 2, line 1-3).

The new term "accessory employee housing structure" (page 2, line 10 to page 3, line 10) is described mostly in physical terms and does not reinforce the relationship of the "accessory employee housing structure" to the farm that the farm dwelling is already accessory to.

Accessory employee housing structures are to have the following characteristics:

- May consist of multiple residential dwelling units;
- Be attached or detached from the single-family dwelling;
- Be no larger than eight hundred habitable square feet per residential dwelling unit;
- All appurtenances to accessory employee housing structures shall not exceed a fixed ratio of employee housing structure per acre of agricultural land leased to the fee owner of the farm dwelling;

Testimony of Sharon Hurd

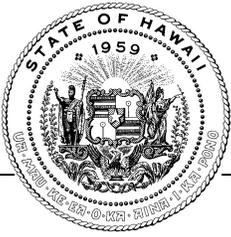
February 6, 2026

Page 2

- No fee owner of the farm dwelling shall cause to condominiumize the accessory employee housing structure from the single-family dwelling; and
- No portion of the farm dwelling shall be used for agricultural tourism.

The measure does not address the relationship between the farm and accessory employee housing structures and the uses of and limitations on the latter. There is no limit on the number of accessory employee housing structures and no guidance on who may occupy these accessory employee housing structures.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.



**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF PLANNING
& SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR

MARY ALICE EVANS
DIRECTOR

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Statement of
MARY ALICE EVANS, Director

before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

Wednesday, February 18, 2026

9:30 AM

State Capitol, Conference Room 325

in consideration of
HB 1737, HD 1
RELATING TO FARM EMPLOYEE HOUSING.

Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems.

The Office of Planning and Sustainable Development (OPSD) **supports** HB 1737, HD 1, which amends HRS §205-2 and §205-4.5 (a)(4) to clarify the permitted uses within the State Agricultural District with respect to farm dwellings and farm employee housing.

OPSD supports more farm employee housing on bona fide farms in the State Agricultural District. Farm employee housing helps bona fide farms retain workers and helps to alleviate the state's housing shortage. OPSD believes that HB 1737, HD 1 promotes this goal while also protecting agricultural lands from non-farm related residential uses.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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e-mail info@hfbf.org; www.hfbf.org

February 18, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

TESTIMONY ON HB 1737, HD1
RELATING TO HOUSING

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 the intent of HB 1737, HD1, which clarifies the permitted uses within the agriculture district with respect to farm dwellings and farm employee housing.

HFB has long supported farm dwellings and farm worker housing as essential components of viable agricultural operations. On-site housing allows farmers and ranchers to live near their operations, respond to livestock and crop needs, support agricultural workers, deter agricultural crimes, and maintain productive farms, particularly in rural areas where housing options are limited. Farm dwellings and farm worker housing play an important role in sustaining local agricultural production and supporting Hawai'i's agricultural workforce.

At the same time, HFB is concerned about the misuse of agricultural lands for residential purposes that are not tied to bona fide agricultural activity. "Gentleman farms" and farm dwellings that function primarily as residential units undermine the intent of the Agricultural District, inflate land values, reduce access to land for working farmers, and create conflicts that ultimately harm legitimate agricultural operations. We support appropriate enforcement to address non-bona fide agricultural use and protect the integrity of agricultural lands.

HFB appreciates the amendments adopted by the Committees on Housing and Water & Land. The HD1 version provides clearer definitions of "farm dwelling" and "farm employee housing," establishes size limitations for employee housing units, and prohibits the use of

condominium property regimes to separate ownership of farm employee housing from the farm dwelling. The express prohibition on agricultural tourism use within farm dwellings also strengthens the integrity of agricultural lands and addresses concerns about misuse.

HFB encourages continued attention to practical implementation and alignment with county zoning standards to ensure that the measure strengthens agricultural land protections while providing reasonable pathways for farm workforce housing.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.



Date, 2026

To: Chairs Evslin and Hashem, Vice Chairs Miyake and Morikawa, and Members of the House Committees on Housing and Water and Land

Subject: **HB 1737**

Aloha,

I am writing to express my support for HB 1737, a bill that provides important clarity and administrative structure for addressing farm employee housing in Hawai'i.

Affordable and accessible housing for agricultural workers is essential to a functioning local food system. Farm laborers, including seasonal, full-time, and family workers, are critical to planting, harvesting, processing, and distributing food across our islands. Yet, many of these dedicated workers face unstable or inadequate housing conditions that undermine their well-being and the long-term viability of agricultural enterprises.

HB 1737 advances a thoughtful approach by creating clear definitions for “farm employee housing,” including associated dwelling units and the establishment of farm dwellings for caretakers and workers. It aligns housing policy with the realities of working agricultural land and helps to reduce ambiguity in land use and permitting processes. Clear statutory definitions help ensure that housing solutions for farm employees are appropriately recognized and supported at the county and state level.

This bill also supports efforts to reduce barriers small and family farmers face when trying to provide on-site or nearby housing for essential workers. By establishing definitions and context within state law, HB 1737 can reduce permitting delays, clarify zoning expectations, and support durable housing outcomes that benefit both workers and the agricultural communities they sustain.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support this measure by passing HB1737. Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of this testimony.

Mahalo,
Carlin McFadden & 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.



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Kaua'i

Aloha Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the House Agriculture & Food Systems 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 HB1737.**

By making farm employee housing an allowable use within the agricultural district, HB1737 helps farmers provide housing for their workforce while maintaining appropriate safeguards to ensure these dwellings remain tied to agricultural use.

The high costs of living, especially housing, have historically made it difficult for agricultural operations to compete with other industries in retaining skilled labor. On-site housing not only alleviates commuting burdens but also makes farm employment a more attractive and sustainable option for residents, promoting a stable and dedicated agricultural workforce.

We suggest a clear definition of "affordable" as it applies to agricultural workers to prevent misuse or speculative conversion of these units. While the 30% of income (HUD affordability standard), and 80% AMI (HUD low-income threshold) standards offer baselines, those metrics reflect the broader economy and do not accurately represent agricultural wages. A stronger approach would base affordability on actual agricultural wage data, such as the median annual wage for agricultural workers. Grounding the definition in real farmworker earnings would ensure these units remain genuinely affordable to the workforce they are intended to serve, rather than nominally "affordable" under standards that exceed typical agricultural incomes.

Ensuring that farm employee housing remains truly workforce-focused and accessible to agricultural laborers will help preserve agricultural lands for productive use, support family farmers, and advance Hawai'i's broader food security and sustainability goals.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union

Feb. 18, 2026, 9:30 a.m.

Hawaii State Capitol

Conference Room 325 and Videoconference

To: House Committee on Agriculture and Food Systems

Rep. Cory M. Chun, Chair

Rep. Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair

From: Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

Ted Kefalas, Director of Strategic Campaigns

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1737 HD1 — RELATING TO FARM EMPLOYEE HOUSING

Aloha chair, vice chair and other committee members,

The Grassroot Institute of Hawaii **supports** [HB1737 HD1](#), which would add a definition of the term “farm employee housing” to state law.

Under the bill, farm employee housing would refer to “one or more residential dwelling units accessory to the farm operation that may be attached or detached from the primary farm dwelling; provided that the farm employee housing shall be no larger than eight hundred habitable square feet under roof per residential dwelling unit.”

Grassroot pointed out in its January 2026 policy brief “[How to facilitate more housing for Hawaii farm and ranch workers](#)” that a lack of affordable housing has consistently been cited as a barrier to expanding agricultural production in Hawaii. The report also made clear that there is no statewide standard for how and where farm employee housing can be built.

Approving this bill would give farmers and ranchers an extra tool to help attract and retain workers, because living on the land could minimize commute times and transportation expenses. Consider the following information:

>> Hawaii imports 85-90% of its food supply.¹

>> A 2020 U.S. Department of Agriculture survey found that 41% of the state’s farmers and ranchers cited a lack of labor as a barrier to expanding their operations.²

>> More than 9,500 people in Hawaii were employed as “hired farm labor” in 2023.³

>> More than half of those people worked on farms and ranches on Hawaii Island alone,⁴ but only one-quarter of Hawaii Island farmers reported hiring labor.

Allowing more housing on farms and ranches, especially for temporary and seasonal workers, would be a win for farm and ranch owners, a win for their employees and a win for everyone who enjoys local food.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Ted Kefalas
Director of Strategic Campaigns
Grassroot Institute of Hawaii

¹ Hannah Leto, Jordan Mitkowski and Katie Hogan et al., “[Agricultural Labor on Hawai’i Island](#),” Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems at Arizona State University, May 2025, p. 1.

² “[Labor Shortage as a Barrier to Agricultural Expansion 2020](#),” Hawaii Department of Agriculture in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, April 2022.

³ “[Hawaii PYs 2024-2027](#),” Hawaii Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, p. 70.

⁴ Hannah Leto, Jordan Mitkowski and Katie Hogan et al., “[Agricultural Labor on Hawai’i Island](#),” Swette Center for Sustainable Food Systems at Arizona State University, May 2025, pp. 4-5.

HB-1737-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 4:32:27 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/18/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
David Fukuzawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Honorable Representatives:

I fully support HB1737 HD1. As my wife and her sister have inherited their family farm since their parents have passed away, they will be continuing to farm the land, but it will be necessary to have an additional residential unit on the said farm, as there is only 1 residential unit at this time. What is proposed to be written in the bill will make it more clear as to what is considered a farm employee residential unit.

Sincerely,

David Fukuzawa

HB-1737-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 6:17:09 PM

Testimony for AGR on 2/18/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support the INTENT of

1737 HB RELATING TO FARM EMPLOYEE HOUSING.

Zero sleep over for Ag toursim (12)

workers "legal" without immigration controvesy, preferrable 808 birth certificate.

HB-1737-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 11:07:51 AM

Testimony for AGR on 2/18/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
James C Clark	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am not a farmer, but I am quite familiar with the troubles of accomplishing simple steps within the building world. We need to make it easier for farmers to build housing for potential employees. Please consider this bill as one that will improve life for all, whether farmers or consumers of food.