

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



SHARON HURD
Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

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

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

**MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2026
3:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224 & VIDEOCONFERENCE**

**HOUSE BILL NO. 2549 HOUSE DRAFT 1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 2098 House Draft 1 that establishes a Clean Plant Program (CPP) within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to support the production, maintenance, and distribution of disease-free, clean plant material to growers, nurseries, and other agricultural producers in the state and appropriates funds. The Department supports this bill.

The Department is mandated to double local food production by 2030 as per Act 151/2019, and supports the Farm-to-State Local Food Purchasing milestones for 2035, 2040, 2045 and 2050, Hawaii Revised Statutes 27-8 that mandates that a percentage of food purchased for public schools, hospitals and other entities must consist of fresh local agricultural products and local value-added, processed agricultural food products. This bill supports achieving the mandated milestones by providing high quality pathogen free plant materials strengthening local production and biosecurity efforts.

This bill addresses the cost and availability of growing materials – seeds, keiki, saplings - and will kick-start production for beginning farmers and/or farmers wanting to scale up. The purpose of the bill is to establish repositories where reliable seeds and/or starter plants would be produced and distributed to Hawaii agricultural producers. The cost would be discounted in exchange for data from the participating farmers and nursery operations, which will be shared with industry as a resource for planting decisions.

The CPP will help farmers recover from disasters that destroy their crops and homeowners who want to grow food for subsistence. Additionally, CPP will partner with

state agencies that encourage food production and non-profit programs that seek to increase food production.

The Hawaii Clean Plant Initiative would establish repositories located in each county where seeds, plantlets, keiki, and grafts would be available for distribution to farmers, ranchers, and growers. The grow-out would take place at the facility using tissue culture, grafting, and/or method best suited for the commodity and be specific to the microclimate of the area.

The project would begin with varieties that have been successfully propagated in Hawaii:

- Bunchy Top Virus-free and Tolerant Bananas
- Ring Spot Virus Resistant Papaya
- High-yielding okra, mamaki tea, ginger, turmeric, green onion, cilantro, celery
- Taro
- Legumes
- Virus Free Sweet Potato Cuttings

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill.



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March 23, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY ON HB 2549, HD1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
3:00 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 supports HB 2549, HD1, which establishes a Clean Plant Program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to support the production, maintenance, and distribution of disease-free, clean plant material for growers, nurseries, and other agricultural producers in the State.

Having access to clean plant material, effective agricultural treatments, diagnostics, and pest management tools is a critical component of Hawai'i's biosecurity system. Clean plant material allows producers to begin production with a clean slate, reducing the risk of introducing pests and diseases into farms, fields, and ranches, and minimizing the spread of contaminants to other crops and operations.

Clean plant programs also help ensure that Hawai'i's agricultural industry can ship and provide pest- and disease-free plants and products. This is essential not only for protecting local farms, but also for maintaining consumer confidence and meeting regulatory and market requirements. Once crops are established, continued access to diagnostics and pest management tools is necessary to maintain plant health and productivity over time.

Access to clean plant materials enables farmers to increase production, improve yields, and expand operations with greater confidence. In a state where pests and diseases can spread rapidly and where production costs are already high, preventing problems before they start is far more effective and economical than responding after an outbreak occurs.

Invasive species continue to pose one of the greatest threats to Hawai'i's agricultural sector. Each year, new pests and diseases are introduced, placing farmers and ranchers at risk and undermining the State's goals of increasing local food production and self-sufficiency. A well-supported Clean Plant Program is a proactive investment that strengthens Hawai'i's broader biosecurity efforts and supports long-term agricultural viability.

HB 2549, HD1 represents a sound investment in agriculture and provides meaningful support to farmers, nurseries, and agricultural producers across the State. By establishing this program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity, the State can help protect existing agricultural operations, encourage responsible expansion, and reinforce Hawai'i's commitment to strong biosecurity practices.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

The Hawai'i Reforestation Policy Hui



March 23, 2026

Hawai'i State Legislature
Senate Committee on Agriculture & Environment

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 2549, HD1, Relating to Agricultural Production

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Reforestation Policy Hui, a coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to forest stewardship, ecological restoration, mālama 'āina, and sustainable land use in Hawai'i, we are writing in support of HB 2549, HD1, relating to agricultural production. This measure establishes a Clean Plant Program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to produce and distribute disease-free plant material to agricultural producers statewide, requires legislative reporting, and appropriates funds to support the program.

Healthy forests and agricultural systems are closely linked and vital to Hawai'i's environmental and economic resilience. Forested watersheds protect freshwater resources, stabilize soils, reduce wildfire risk, and support biodiversity, while also sustaining productive agricultural lands. Restoration and agroforestry efforts—including the cultivation of native and culturally important species such as koa, 'iliahi, maile, and māmaki—help restore degraded landscapes, strengthen local economies, and support long-term climate adaptation.

Access to high-quality, disease-free plant material is fundamental to the success of these efforts. Expanding clean nursery capacity helps prevent the spread of pests and pathogens, improves plant survival, and strengthens both agricultural production and reforestation initiatives. Investments in biosecure nursery infrastructure support land stewardship, protect natural resources, and create local workforce and economic opportunities.

HB 2549, HD1, represents an important step toward strengthening Hawai'i's agricultural and restoration systems by supporting coordinated investment in plant health and production capacity. These efforts will help ensure the long-term sustainability and resilience of Hawai'i's landscapes.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this important measure.



Hawaii Cattlemen's Council, Inc.

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

HB2549
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

March 23, 2026, 3:00 PM
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

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

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **supports HB2549 HD 1** which establishes a Clean Plant Program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to support the production, maintenance, and distribution of disease-free, clean plant material to growers, nurseries, and other agricultural producers in the State.

We support this measure to establish a program that prioritizes inspection of plant material for invasive species and propagating disease-free plant material within the state. This is a step in the right direction – to minimize the importation of plant material to the state, which will also reduce the chances of introducing invasive species and diseases. Invasive species cause immense economical burden on agricultural producers who already struggle to carve out a thin profit margin. Invasive pests like the Two-lined Spittlebug are transported in soil and plant material and it should become common biosecurity practice to inspect and clean all material and vehicles, especially if it is coming from an infested area.

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



HB-2549-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/20/2026 10:57:26 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/23/2026 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

SUPPORT!!! MAHALO!

HB-2549-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/20/2026 6:53:53 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/23/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
William Caron	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in **strong support** of HB2549, which establishes a Clean Plant Program within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to support the production, maintenance, and distribution of disease-free, clean plant material to growers, nurseries, and other agricultural producers across our state.

Why This Program Is Essential

Hawai‘i's unique isolation has given us an agricultural heritage found nowhere else, but that same isolation makes us extraordinarily vulnerable to plant diseases and pests. Once an invasive pathogen or insect becomes established in our islands, eradication is often impossible, and control becomes a permanent, expensive burden.

The Legislature has recognized this reality repeatedly in recent years. In 2022, lawmakers noted that existing State-owned plant quarantine facilities were "unable to mitigate the demand for disease-resistant stock" and that increasing capacity was essential to protect growers. In 2024, the Department of Agriculture's biosecurity program received strong support from a coalition including the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, County of Maui, Hawai‘i Farm Bureau, Hawai‘i Floriculture and Nursery Association, and many others who understood that "pre-entry measures, port-of-entry inspections, post-entry measures, and other programs help protect the State from the introduction and spread of harmful pests."

HB2549 builds on this foundation by creating a dedicated Clean Plant Program focused on one of the most effective biosecurity strategies: ensuring that the plant material entering our agricultural system is itself free from disease.

What a Clean Plant Program Does

The Clean Plant Program would support the production, maintenance, and distribution of disease-free, clean plant material. This is not simply a convenience for growers—it is a critical line of defense.

When farmers plant material that is already infected or infested, they introduce problems into their fields that may take years to detect and even longer to control. Coffee leaf rust, which

devastated Hawai‘i Island coffee production when it arrived in 2020, spread in part through the movement of infected plant material. The response required emergency rules restricting movement of coffee plants and a search for rust-resistant varieties—a search that was hampered by inadequate quarantine and clean stock infrastructure.

A Clean Plant Program addresses this vulnerability at its source. By providing growers with verified disease-free material, we reduce the risk of introducing pathogens through the very act of planting. This benefits not only individual farmers but entire agricultural sectors and the ecosystems that border production areas.

The Statutory Framework

The Department of Agriculture is already mandated under Hawai‘i Revised Statutes §150A-53 to implement biosecurity measures, including establishing parameters for facilities that ensure the safety of agricultural commodities. The Department's Plant Industry Division plays a critical role in inspecting imports and regulating the movement of plant material to prevent the establishment of harmful pests.

HB2549 provides the specific programmatic authority and resources needed to make clean plant material a reality. It operationalizes a concept that has been discussed in previous legislative sessions—including SB479 in 2021, which sought to develop a program to safely distribute disease- and insect-free tropical plant materials to Hawai‘i farmers—and gives it dedicated funding and focus.

Benefits Across Sectors

The benefits of a Clean Plant Program extend across Hawai‘i's agricultural landscape:

- **Commercial growers** receive planting stock free from viruses and pests, reducing crop losses and pesticide dependence.
- **Nurseries** can offer customers healthier plants with greater confidence.
- **Backyard growers and home gardeners** gain access to material that won't introduce problems into their communities.
- **The broader public** is protected from new pest introductions that could threaten native ecosystems and agricultural lands.

A Proactive Investment

Biosecurity is often described as an insurance policy—money spent today to avoid catastrophic costs tomorrow. The coffee leaf rust experience is instructive: a single introduction has cost farmers millions in lost production and ongoing management expenses. A Clean Plant Program is a fraction of those costs and prevents the next introduction before it occurs.

The program also supports economic development. When Hawai‘i growers have access to clean, high-quality planting material, they can produce more reliably, compete more effectively, and

invest with confidence. Our agricultural sector cannot thrive if farmers are constantly battling diseases introduced through their own planting stock.

HB2549 is a forward-looking investment in the health and resilience of Hawai'i's agriculture. It addresses a critical gap in our biosecurity infrastructure and provides growers with the tools they need to succeed. I urge this committee to pass HB2549 and establish the Clean Plant Program as a permanent part of our agricultural protection system.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.