

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



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

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 FINANCE

**THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2026
2:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 308**

**SENATE BILL NO. 2153, SENATE DRAFT 2, HOUSE DRAFT 1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE**

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 2153, Senate Draft 2, House Draft 1, that requires the Board of Agriculture and Biosecurity to convene a Bona Fide Farmer Working Group to develop multi-tiered, matrix-based definitions for the terms "bona fide farmer" and "bona fide agricultural activity." The Working Group is to report its findings and recommendations and any proposed legislation to the 2028 Legislature. There is no appropriation. The Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (Department) offers comments and two amendments.

The Department notes that HD1 deleted four attributes to be used in defining "bona fide farmer" that are found in SD2 (Page 9, lines 9-12):

- (1) Commercial focus;
- (2) Farm size or scale;
- (3) Minimum income threshold; and
- (4) Primary occupation

These four attributes are familiar to those who are aware of earlier State and county legislative attempts to define bona fide farmers and bona fide agricultural activities. They are common-sense and with further definition, can stand as measurable characteristics to qualify farmers and activities as bona fide.

The Department proposes the following amendment to incorporate these four attributes into HD1.

Section 2, paragraph (d) on page 3, line 18 to page 4, line 3:

"(d) In developing the multi-tiered, matrix-based definitions for the terms "bona fide farmer" and "bona fide agricultural activity", the bona fide farmer working group shall consider the following tiers, further define and incorporate the following criteria within each tier:

(1) Commercial focus;

(2) Farm size or scale;

(3) Minimum income threshold; and

(4) Primary occupation,

determine the individuals that are to be included in each tier, and examine the feasibility of implementing the tier system when considering the different types of farming operations in the State:"

The members of the Working Group are to serve without compensation but shall be reimbursed for reasonable expenses including travel, in performance of their duties (page 5, lines 6-9). The Department requests an appropriation of \$225,000 and authorization to expend the same for each of the two years of the Working Group's existence to cover travel expenses, hiring an exempt program specialist to assist the Department Chair, and other contractual services, as necessary.

The Department continues to focus attention on Hawaii's commercial farmers as the primary agents to achieve the State's numeric goals for food self-sufficiency, while acknowledging the role of informal and subsistence farmers in producing food for the families and communities so engaged.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our testimony.



OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

‘Ōlelo Hō‘ike ‘Aha Kau Kānāwai

COMMENTS ON SENATE BILL 2153 SD2 HD1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Ke Kōmike Hale o ka ‘Oihana ‘Imi Kālā
(House Committee on Finance)

Ke Kapitala ‘o Hawai‘i
(Hawai‘i State Capitol)

‘Apelila 2, 2026

2:00PM

Lumi 308

Aloha e Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) offers **COMMENTS** on **SB2153 SD2 HD1**, which requires the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB) to convene a bona fide farmer working group to develop multi-tiered, matrix-based definitions for the terms “bona fide farmer” and “bona fide agricultural activity.”

OHA appreciates our inclusion as a member of the bona fide farmer working group. The intent of this measure to ensure that agricultural lands are used for legitimate agricultural activities and that exemptions for agricultural tourism and residential use are not exploited to facilitate patently non-agricultural uses and long term degradation of agriculture lands. At the same time, for Native Hawaiians, agriculture is a fundamental part of cultural practices, perpetuating ‘ike kūpuna, expressing kuleana and pilina with ‘āina, and allowing for ‘ohana and community subsistence. Traditional and customary practices such as lo‘i kalo, loko i‘a, agroforestry, and other ahupua‘a-based systems are vital to community food security and cultural identity, yet don’t always generate monetary income.

It is for this reason that OHA strongly supports the recognition of subsistence, cultural, and community-based agricultural production as legitimate and bona fide agricultural activities. OHA appreciates that these farming methods are contemplated in this measure and included as small-scale and diversified farmers.¹ As the working group

¹ See page 5, line 10-3, definition of “Tier II. Small-scale and diversified farmers.”

develops definitions of “bona fide farmer” and “bona fide agricultural activity,” meaningful consultation with Native Hawaiian farmers, cultural practitioners, homestead communities, and subsistence producers will be essential to ensure that any adopted definitions are culturally informed and equitable.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify on this critical issue.



Hawaii Cattlemen's Council, Inc.

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
Rep. Chris Todd, Chair
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

SB2153 SD1 HD1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

April 2, 2026, 2:00 PM
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee,

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **supports SB2153 SD1 HD1** which requires the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to convene a Bona Fide Farmer Working Group to develop multi-tiered, matrix-based definitions for the terms "bona fide farmer" and "bona fide agricultural activity".

Clearly defining a bonafide farmer allows those who are truly producing food for the community to gain access to the support needed from state programs. In a time where we are losing agricultural land to other uses, it also ensures that state agricultural lands are indeed used for agricultural activities.

Defining a bonafide farmer is a difficult task, as many agricultural producers vary. However, a multi-tiered approach and the directive to work with stakeholders to determine these definitions is a path forward to recognizing that bonafide farmers can operate differently, but must be defined in order to receive benefits without losing out on land and resources to gentleman farmers.

We support the efforts of a working group to work through the details of any definitions and implications and the Hawaii Cattlemen's Council is willing and able to participate in this work.

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





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

April 2, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

TESTIMONY ON SB 2153, SD2, HD1
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Conference Room 308 & Videoconference
2:00 PM

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice-Chair Takenouchi, 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 SB 2153, SD2, HD1, which requires the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to convene a working group to develop multi-tiered, matrix-based definitions for the terms "bona fide farmer" and "bona fide agricultural activity."

The issue of defining "bona fide agriculture" has come before the Legislature and the Counties multiple times over the years. Historically, while the term was not explicitly defined in statute, there was a general understanding of who farmers and ranchers were and what constituted agricultural activity. Over time, agricultural practices have diversified, land use pressures have increased, and that shared understanding has become less clear.

There are numerous policies, programs, and land use designations that are intended specifically to support agriculture. These tools are meant for bona fide agricultural producers, and the lack of clarity around definitions can create challenges for policymakers, agencies, and counties tasked with implementing those programs fairly and consistently. At the same time, agriculture in Hawai'i encompasses a wide range of operations, scales, and production models that cannot be easily captured by a single rigid definition.

HFB appreciates the changes made in SB 2153 to shift this measure toward a Working Group approach. Developing definitions of this importance requires careful consideration

and input from a broad range of stakeholders. A collaborative process will help ensure that any resulting framework reflects the diversity of agricultural operations in Hawai'i while discouraging misuse of agricultural designations.

We also appreciate that the measure contemplates a multi-tiered, matrix-based framework, which can better account for differences in scale, production type, geography, and market realities across the State.

HFB looks forward to participating in the stakeholder process to develop definitions for bona fide farmers and bona fide agricultural activity that are practical, flexible, and workable for implementation at both the State and county levels.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important and complex issue.

April, 2026

To: Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi and the House Committee on Finance

Subject: **SB 2153 SD2 HD1 - Relating to Agriculture**

Aloha,

The Food+ Policy Team respectfully submits this testimony in support of SB 2153, which directs the Board of Agriculture and Biosecurity to develop a multi-tiered, matrix-based assessment framework to define the terms “bona fide farmer” and “bona fide agricultural activity.”

Accurate, consistent, and operational definitions for these terms are fundamental to effective agricultural policy in Hawai'i. Agriculture is a cornerstone of our local economy, culture, and food resilience, yet zoning, incentive programs, land use classifications, and regulatory decisions often hinge on who qualifies as a farmer and what counts as legitimate agricultural activity. Without clear definitions, land that should support food production can be diverted to non-agricultural uses, and genuine producers can face barriers to accessing programs, incentives, and protections intended for them.

SB 2153 acknowledges this gap and directs the Board of Agriculture and Biosecurity to work collaboratively with stakeholders to create a transparent framework that ensures consistency across agencies and programs. By establishing objective criteria, this measure will: Support equitable access to agricultural resources and programs for real producers, improve clarity for landowners and communities dealing with agricultural zoning and land use decisions, reduce ambiguity that can undermine long-term planning and investment by farmers and strengthen the integrity of our agricultural policies and land stewardship goals. Importantly, this bill advances the voices of those who are actively engaged in farming and it ensures that policy accurately reflects the realities of agricultural work in Hawai'i. I respectfully urge the committee to support SB 2153 and move it forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit 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.

Officers

Kaipo Kekona
State President



Christian Zuckerman
Vice-President

Maureen Datta
Secretary

Reba Lopez
Treasurer

Chapter Presidents

Kelii Gannet
Kohala, Hawaii

East Hawaii

Puna, Hawaii

Ka'u, Hawaii

Maureen Datta
Kona, Hawaii

Gina Lind
Hana, Maui

Mason Scharer
Haleakala, Maui

Kaiea Medeiros
Mauna Kahalawai,
Maui

Kaipo Kekona
Lahaina, Maui

Kilia Avelino-Purdy
Molokai

Negus Manna
Lana'i

India Clark
North Shore, O'ahu

Christian Zuckerman
Wai'anae, O'ahu

Rachel LaDrig
Waimanalo, O'ahu

Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, O'ahu

Natalie Urminska
Kauai

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Finance 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 SB2153.**

Hawaii currently lacks a uniform standard for what constitutes a bona fide farmer, and the absence of clear definitions allows landholders who are not genuinely engaged in agriculture to take advantage of agricultural zoning, tax classifications, and land entitlements. SB2153, HD1, addresses this by convening a stakeholder working group to develop multi-tiered, matrix-based definitions for "bona fide farmer" and "bona fide agricultural activity." The working group structure is the right approach. Getting these definitions wrong would have serious consequences for small farmers, cultural practitioners, and ranchers across the state. A stakeholder process that includes the organizations closest to the ground allows the definitions to be developed with the nuance that Hawaii's diverse agricultural sector requires.

This bill can be more than an enforcement tool against bad actors. When the State can accurately identify who is engaged in agricultural production, that infrastructure becomes a mechanism for distributing benefits. Hawaii currently has no comprehensive data on who is producing food, what they are growing, or what support they need. A farmer registration system tied to these definitions could connect verified producers to state agricultural leases, procurement preferences, grant programs, disaster relief, reduced water rates, and technical assistance. Guam implemented such a system with no minimum farm size or income threshold. We encourage the working group to examine a similar framework for Hawaii. We look forward to participating in the working group and urge the Committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawaii Farmers Union