

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



SHARON HURD
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
KA 'OIHANA MAHI'AI
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TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 2025
1:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224

SENATE BILL NO. 127
RELATING AGRICULTURAL GRANTS

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 506. This bill seeks to establish the Conventional Farming Grant Program for small and midsized farmers and appropriate funds. The Department of Agriculture (Department) fully supports this initiative.

The Department recognizes that the majority of farm enterprises in Hawai'i are small operations. According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, local farms with annual revenues of less than \$250,000 accounted for 6,246 farms or 95.1% of all farms in the state. In contrast, only 323 farms, or 4.9% of the total, reported annual revenues exceeding \$250,000. The Department also acknowledges that many local farms are facing significant financial challenges, arising from the high costs of labor, land, water, planting materials, fertilizers, feed, equipment, construction, energy, and transportation. This grant program is both timely and essential, as it would provide critical support to small and midsized farms, enabling them to grow and raise food to sustain Hawai'i food security efforts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important measure.





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January 29, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY ON SB 127
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL GRANTS

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
1:00 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 SB 127, which establishes the conventional farming grant program to provide grants to small and midsized farmers who practice conventional farming.

HFB represents the interests of farmers, ranchers, and the agriculture community across the state. We are committed to supporting all sectors of agriculture, including conventional farming. Conventional farming plays a vital role in ensuring food security, sustaining rural economies, and strengthening Hawai'i's agricultural capacity.

Small and midsized farmers are the backbone of Hawai'i's agricultural industry. However, they face significant challenges, including high input costs, competition in local and global markets, and limited access to financial resources. SB 127 will provide targeted grants that will alleviate some of these burdens, enabling farmers to focus on productivity and growth.

Conventional farming remains one of the most efficient ways to produce large quantities of food to meet the needs of Hawai'i's communities. These practices allow farmers to optimize yields, manage resources effectively, and contribute to a stable and diverse food supply. In the face of rising food insecurity and increasing costs of living, supporting conventional farming is an investment in Hawai'i's self-sufficiency and resilience.

Agriculture is a critical driver of Hawai'i's economy, contributing to job creation, tourism, and local food systems. By providing grants to small and midsized farmers, this program

will stimulate economic activity, encourage the retention of agricultural lands, and support the state's broader goals of increasing local food production.

SB 127 is an essential step toward recognizing and supporting conventional farming's contributions to Hawai'i's food security, economy, and rural communities. We respectfully urge the committee to pass this measure and provide the necessary resources for Hawai'i's small and midsized farmers to thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter.



Officers

Kaipo Kekona
State President

Anabella Bruch
Vice-President

Maureen Datta
Secretary

Reba Lopez
Treasurer

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

Chapter Presidents

Clarence Baber
Kohala, Hawaii

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. **HFUU supports SB127.**

Tony Vera
East Hawaii

Grant funding has the potential to bolster local food production, enhance economic viability, and support the agricultural sector's contributions to the state's food security and sustainability goals. While the intent of the bill is commendable, adjustments are necessary to ensure that the program is equitable, inclusive, and aligned with broader agricultural and environmental priorities.

Puna, Hawaii

Andrea Drayer
Ka'u, Hawaii

Maureen Datta
Kona, Hawaii

Areas of Concern and Recommendations

Eligibility Should Include All Farming Systems

Limiting eligibility to farms practicing "conventional farming" excludes many producers who utilize organic, regenerative, or mixed farming methods. These approaches contribute significantly to sustainability, soil health, and food security but would be unfairly excluded under the current language.

Recommendation: Expand eligibility to include all farming systems, ensuring equitable access to funding for diverse agricultural practices.

Definition of "Conventional Farming" is Problematic

The bill defines "conventional farming" in a manner that is overly narrow and ambiguous, focusing only on seed selection methods while excluding biotechnology and organic farming. This definition may inadvertently exclude farms that blend traditional and modern methods or adopt sustainable practices.

Recommendation: Remove the definition of "conventional farming" or refine it to focus on broader agricultural practices without arbitrary exclusions.

Including Small-Scale and Underserved Producers

By including midsized farms with gross incomes of up to \$999,999—or potentially more based on USDA updates—the program may disproportionately benefit larger operations with greater access to resources.

Recommendation: Allocate funding priorities for small farms, beginning farmers, Native Hawaiian producers, and historically underserved communities to ensure equitable resource distribution.

Need for Clearer Grant Allocation and Oversight

The bill does not specify how grant funds will be allocated or evaluated, leaving room for inefficiencies and potential misuse. The absence of detailed criteria may hinder the program's ability to deliver measurable results.

Recommendation: Include explicit grant award criteria, allowable expenditures, and

Fawn Helekahi-Burns
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

Ted Radovich
Waimānalo, O'ahu

Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, O'ahu

Natalie Urminska
Kaua'i

metrics to evaluate program effectiveness and ensure accountability.

The proposed grant program has the potential to address critical needs within Hawaii's agricultural sector and strengthen the state's food system. By addressing the issues outlined above, the program can better serve farmers, align with state sustainability goals, and ensure that resources are distributed equitably. Improvements to the bill will help maximize its effectiveness and contribute to a resilient and inclusive agricultural future for Hawaii.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Kaipo Kekona, President HFUU/HFUF

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kaipo S.K. Kekona". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB127, RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL GRANTS

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT JANUARY 29, 2025

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Agriculture and Environment Committee:

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **SUPPORTS** SB127, RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL GRANTS. Pursuant to the Platform of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i, the Party supports a robust agricultural sector to ensure a sustainable and self-sufficient future for Hawai'i, providing sufficient, healthy, and affordable food.

Hawai'i faces significant food security challenges due to heavy reliance on food imports, making us vulnerable to supply chain disruptions and price fluctuations. A robust local agricultural sector is crucial to address this vulnerability. By strengthening our local food production, we can ensure residents have access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food while creating economic opportunities and supporting our rural communities. This measure recognizes the vital role of conventional farmers in achieving these goals by providing financial assistance to small and midsized conventional farms.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify in support of SB127, RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL GRANTS. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact the Democratic Party of Hawai'i at legislation@hawaiidemocrats.org.

SB-127

Submitted on: 1/26/2025 1:50:43 PM

Testimony for AEN on 1/29/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jacqueline S. Ambrose	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

YES to - Establishes the conventional farming grant program to provide grants to small and midsize farmers who practice conventional farming. Appropriates moneys.

SB-127

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 4:06:24 PM

Testimony for AEN on 1/29/2025 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry SUPPORT SB 127 Relating To Agricultural Grants.

Encourage more and new farmers to sustain Hawai'i food security