

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
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TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

FEBRUARY 5, 2025
1:03 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224

SENATE BILL NO. 523
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL BIOSECURITY

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 523. SB523 amends Chapter 141, Hawaii Revised Statutes by adding a new section as follows §141-Biosecurity fencing cost-sharing program; reimbursement rates; eligibility; reporting; rules. (a) The department shall establish and administer a biosecurity fencing cost-sharing program to provide financial assistance to eligible applicants for the installation, construction, repair, or improvement of agricultural productivity. The program shall also incentivize the adoption of approved conservation plans. The Hawaii Department of Agriculture strongly supports this measure.

Farmers and ranchers are severely impacted by invasive species that are capable of transmitting infectious diseases to livestock and destroying crops and forage. This measure will assist producers to construct and repair fencing to mitigate these negative impacts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.





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Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Senate Agriculture and Environment 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. **HFUU supports SB523.**

Invasive species such as feral pigs, axis deer, and other destructive animals pose significant threats to our local farms and ranches by damaging crops, endangering livestock, and undermining our efforts to build a robust and sustainable agriculture sector in Hawai'i. By creating a framework for cost-sharing, this measure ensures that farmers across the state, regardless of size, can safeguard their operations from these threats and continue providing fresh, locally produced food to our communities.

We are particularly encouraged by the program's emphasis on soil and water conservation district-approved conservation plans. The Hawaii Farmers Union stands firmly behind conservation practices that prioritize healthy soils, responsible water use, and long-term land stewardship. Aligning reimbursement rates with the adoption of these approved conservation plans not only protects farms from invasive species but also incentivizes essential environmental safeguards. This synergy between biosecurity and responsible land management sets a positive precedent for the future of agriculture in our islands.

Finally, the appropriation of funds to support the Biosecurity Fencing Cost-Sharing Program underscores the Legislature's commitment to fostering a resilient and innovative agricultural sector in Hawai'i. By investing in fencing and exclusionary infrastructure, we address a critical barrier to farm viability while promoting meaningful conservation outcomes.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union



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February 5, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY ON SB 523
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL BIOSECURITY

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
1:03 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 523, which requires the Department of Agriculture (DOA) to establish and administer a Biosecurity Fencing Cost-Sharing Program and appropriates funds for this effort. Fencing is one of the most effective tools for protecting agricultural lands from invasive species such as axis deer, feral pigs, and other threats that devastate crops, pasture lands, and native ecosystems.

Invasive species are among the most serious threats to Hawai'i's agricultural industry, impacting both farmers and ranchers statewide. Feral ungulates destroy crops, trample pastureland, damage irrigation systems, and contribute to soil erosion and the spread of invasive weeds. These species also increase the risk of disease transmission to livestock, further threatening the viability of local food production. The economic losses caused by these invasive species have been significant, reducing farm and ranch productivity and increasing operational costs.

A Biosecurity Fencing Cost-Sharing Program will provide critical financial assistance to farmers and ranchers in constructing and upgrading fencing to mitigate these impacts. By helping agricultural producers offset the high costs of fencing, this program will improve the resilience of Hawai'i's agricultural sector, reduce losses due to invasive species, and support local food security efforts. The program will also incentivize the adoption of conservation plans through soil and water conservation districts, further strengthening the long-term sustainability of agricultural lands.

To maximize the effectiveness of this program, we recommend that the Department of Agriculture:

- Ensure that funding is distributed equitably across all islands, as invasive species challenges vary by region.
- Prioritize applicants who demonstrate active agricultural operations that are significantly impacted by feral ungulates.
- Develop a streamlined application process to ensure that farmers and ranchers can access funding in a timely manner.
- Coordinate with federal programs to leverage additional funding opportunities and maximize available resources for fencing projects.

We urge the committee to advance SB 523 to provide essential support for Hawai'i's farmers and ranchers in their efforts to protect agricultural lands from invasive species.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter.



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

SB523
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL BIOSECURITY

Wednesday, February 5, 2025, 1:03 PM
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

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

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **supports SB523** which requires the Department of Agriculture to establish and administer a Biosecurity Fencing Cost-Sharing Program.

Fencing is an important tool for keeping invasive species out, keeping livestock in, managing grazing, and in turn improving the landscape. Feral animals like deer and pigs are a threat to biosecurity as they are vectors for diseases like bovine tuberculosis. Fencing is a biosecurity tool, but it is expensive to install. Biosecurity impacts the whole state, not just farmers and ranchers. We appreciate this bill that would assist producers with installing fences through a cost share program.

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. Our member ranchers represent over 60,000 head of beef cows; more than 75% of all the beef cows in the State. Ranchers are the stewards of over 750 thousand acres of land in Hawaii, or 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



SB-523

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 12:08:20 PM

Testimony for AEN on 2/5/2025 1:03:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Sara Moore	Testifying for KEALIA RANCH	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Please support SB523. Fencing is an important tool for keeping invasive species out, keeping livestock in, managing grazing, and in turn improving the landscape. Feral animals like deer and pigs are a threat to biosecurity as they are vectors for diseases like bovine tuberculosis. Fencing is a biosecurity tool, but it is expensive to install. Biosecurity impacts the whole state, not just farmers and ranchers. We appreciate this bill that would assist producers with installing fences through a cost share program.

SB-523

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 2:43:27 PM

Testimony for AEN on 2/5/2025 1:03:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nancy D Moser	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In Support of SB 523

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee.

This measure moves in the right direction toward greater biosecurity and promoting our food security through protecting crops from damage.

Please pass this measure.

Sincerely,

Nancy Moser

in Waikoloa 96738

SB-523

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 8:41:49 AM

Testimony for AEN on 2/5/2025 1:03:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Angelica Melone	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I am testifying in strong support of SB523, especially as a resident of Maui, where the pressures of invasive species pose a significant threat to our agricultural operations. This biosecurity fencing cost-sharing program will be invaluable in helping local farmers and ranchers, like those on Maui, protect their crops and livestock from the damaging effects of invasive species such as axis deer and feral pigs. Providing financial assistance for fencing will not only safeguard agricultural productivity but also promote the long-term sustainability of our farming community. This program is crucial for ensuring that agriculture continues to thrive in Hawaii, despite the ongoing challenges posed by invasive species.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.