

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

JANUARY 27, 2025
1:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224

SENATE BILL NO. 688
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify to Senate Bill 688 that appropriates funds to establish grant specialist positions within the Department of Agriculture. The Department supports this bill.

The bill acknowledges there is a need to connect funding opportunities offered by federal, state, counties, or private entities to the farmers and ranchers, the targeted beneficiaries, and the bill helps them by providing grant specialists that have the skills and experience to apply for, obtain and fulfill the requirements of the grant. This bill serves the agriculture industry by linking the stakeholders to the available funds and maximizes the chance they will be successful in obtaining resources needed to maintain or expand their operations.

The three full-time equivalent (3.0 FTE) grant specialist positions within the Department would be considered Program Specialists SR24 level employees.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure





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January 27, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY ON SB 688
RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
1:00 PM

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice-Chair Richards, and Members of the Committees:

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 688, which appropriates funds to establish grant specialist positions within the Department of Agriculture.

The decrease in direct Federal appropriations for agriculture has resulted in an increased dependence on grants. Many federal programs have become competitive grant programs.

Hawai'i's farmers and ranchers are finding it difficult to secure the financial support necessary to build capacity. Grant writing for USDA, State, County, and other grants usually involves a very complex application process that can be difficult to navigate. This often deters farmers and ranchers from applying for grants. Well-trained and skilled grant specialists could assist farmers and ranchers in obtaining USDA and other grants by helping them apply for and fulfill their requirements.

Access to USDA and other grants can result in increased capacity, new business opportunities, increased employment opportunities and address Hawai'i's goals of increased self-sufficiency and sustainability.

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



Email: communications@ulupono.com

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT
Monday, January 27, 2025 — 1:00 p.m.

Ulupono Initiative strongly supports SB 688, Relating to Agriculture.

Dear Chair Gabbard and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mariah Yoshizu, and I am the Government Affairs Associate at Ulupono Initiative. We are a Hawai'i-focused impact investment firm that strives to improve the quality of life throughout the islands by helping our communities become more resilient and self-sufficient through locally produced food, renewable energy, clean transportation choices, and better management of freshwater resources.

Ulupono strongly supports SB 688, which appropriates funds to establish grant specialist positions within the Department of Agriculture (DOA).

Ulupono supports the State's efforts to actively pursue grant opportunities that help local agriculturalists. Many federal programs are dedicated to aiding departments or agencies across the states that can apply for funding to support local initiatives. Establishing and funding positions within the DOA for this work is extremely timely, not only to secure new funding for local farmers and ranchers, but also to preserve existing grant funding amid current uncertainties at the federal level.

Based on a preliminary search of federal funding opportunities available in FY25, the DOA identified more than 20 distinct funding opportunities totaling more than \$22 million in potential awards. These range from agricultural innovation to water infrastructure to food systems development. The DOA is well positioned to secure significant federal resources, but only if equipped with sufficient staff capacity to pursue these opportunities, as many of these grants require complex applications with detailed project budgets, measurable outcomes, and coordination across agencies and stakeholders. Without this capacity, Hawai'i risks leaving millions in federal dollars on the table that could otherwise support critical investments in agricultural infrastructure, food security, and more. Even securing just a few of the larger grants like the \$5 million Regional Conservation Partnership Program or Regional Agricultural Promotion Program would justify the personnel costs with substantial and transformative return on investment.

For example, from 2014 to 2023, Ulupono provided funding for grant writers with organizations such as The Kohala Center, the O'ahu Agriculture and Conservation Association, and the Hawai'i Farm Bureau. These efforts brought in a total of approximately \$140 million, 100 times the full grant writing investment. Ulupono believes that the State should strongly consider general funding DOA grant writers as they will similarly prove well worth the investment and result in millions of dollars in federal funding to further support the State's agricultural efforts.

Investing in a Sustainable Hawai'i



We appreciate this committee's effort to hear important measures that look to establish long-term support for our local farmers and ranchers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Mariah Yoshizu
Government Affairs Associate

Attachment

STRENGTHENING HDOA'S ABILITY TO ACCESS FEDERAL FUNDING

Funding grant writing staff within the Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) is a valuable investment that can yield a high return and long-term benefits for the state. Not only are they essential for pursuing new funding but also for maintaining existing federal grants – particularly crucial given current uncertainties in the federal funding landscape – which makes it imperative to build this capacity as quickly as possible. Filling these positions also follows through on legislators' requests to maximize existing positions toward legislative intent.

Budget Request

Three grant writer positions to be dedicated to securing block and competitive federal grant programs.

- HDOA manages approximately \$6 million in recurring annual grants. For FY2025, an additional \$22 million in new federal funding opportunities has been identified, bringing the total potential grant funding to \$28 million.
- **Examples of funding opportunities are:**
 - \$5 million - USDA Regional Agricultural Promotion Program
 - \$5 million - U.S. Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART Storage Projects
 - \$1.82 million - USDA Local Food for Schools and Child Care Program
 - \$1.32 million for school food programs
 - \$496,000 for child care facilities
 - \$1.21 million - USDA Local Food Purchase Assistance Program
 - \$1 million - USDA Regional Food Systems Partnerships
- These grants support diverse agricultural initiatives including innovation, water infrastructure improvements, and food systems development.

Why Grant Writers?

This investment in personnel could result in a return on investment dozens of times over. Skilled grant writers will help the State to:

- Access federal funds by preparing competitive and compelling grant proposals that align with local farmer needs
- Identify and pursue grants that supplement and leverage existing State resources, maximizing the impact of HDOA's programs

Federal grants will provide:

- Additional means to support important projects and services without solely relying on State funds, especially in times of natural disasters and economic hardship
- A diversified source of long-term funding for HDOA, offering stability and flexibility to address emerging challenges or capitalize on new opportunities



STRENGTHENING HDOA'S ABILITY TO ACCESS FEDERAL FUNDING

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



Did You Know That ...

Stimulus bills approved by Congress beginning in 2020 unleashed the largest flood of federal money into the U.S. economy. Roughly \$5 trillion went to households, mom-and-pop shops, restaurants, airlines, hospitals, local governments, schools, and other institutions around the country grappling with the blow inflicted by COVID-19. A number of large USDA grant programs were created. The HDOA needs grant writer support in order to go after these multi-million-dollar opportunities.

Other Benefits for the State

By having grant writers on HDOA's staff, the State will benefit from:

- Grant writing is a specialized skill, and having dedicated grant writers allows other HDOA staff to focus on their core responsibilities leading to better use of resources and expertise.
- Aligned grant-seeking efforts with the HDOA's strategic goals and priorities ensures that all federal funding opportunities will support the agency's long-term objectives.
- Stronger partnership with Hawai'i's congressional delegation to better communicate the agricultural industry's needs.

Funding Invested vs. Secured (\$s in Millions)



Return on Investment

Grant writers provide a significant return on investment

Investing in grant-writing capacity not only pays for itself but also brings in funds several times the initial investment.

- Ulupono Initiative invested \$1.4 million in grant writers over the past 10 years through organizations such as The Kohala Center, O'ahu Agriculture & Conservation Association, and Hawai'i Farm Bureau.
- Secured ~\$140 million for local agriculture (100x return on investment).
- This included unprecedented funding from the USDA.
 - \$40 million from the Climate-Smart Commodities program to help farmers fund climate-smart farming practices that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
 - \$30 million from the Regional Food Business Centers (RFBC) program to establish regional centers, which provide farmers with grants and connect them with federal programs.
 - \$3.2 million from the newly created USDA Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure (RFSI) program.



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

Tony Vera
East Hawaii

Puna, Hawaii

Andrea Drayer
Ka'u, Hawaii

Maureen Datta
Kona, 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 SB688.**

SB688 addresses a barrier frequently faced by farmers and ranchers in Hawaii: the complexities of securing grants to support their agricultural operations. The creation of grant specialist positions as proposed in this bill is a proactive step in providing much-needed support to our agricultural community. These specialists would provide invaluable assistance, streamlining the grant application process, and empowering farmers and ranchers to access funds that can enhance their production capabilities and create economic opportunities within the state.

This initiative not only promises to improve individual agricultural businesses but collectively strengthens Hawaii's agricultural sector, which is essential for increasing local food production and self-sufficiency. The anticipated increase in grant accessibility will enable more farms to flourish, contributing to the overall economic health of Hawaii and reducing dependence on imported food products. This bill represents a smart investment in our state's future, fostering innovation, boosting employment, and reinforcing the agricultural backbone of Hawaii.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Kaipo Kekona, President HFUU/HFUF

Fawn Helekahi-Burns
Hāna, Maui

Mason Scharer
Haleakalā, Maui

Kaiea Medeiros
Mauna Kahālāwai,
Maui

Kaipo Kekona
Lahaina, Maui

Kilia Avelino-Purdy
Molokai

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
Kauai



Hawaii Cattlemen's Council, Inc.

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair

Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair

SB688

RELATING TO AGRICULTURE

Monday, January 27, 2025, 1:00PM
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

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

The Hawaii Cattlemen's Council **supports SB688** which appropriates funds to establish grant specialist positions within the Department of Agriculture.

Grant writing is often time-consuming and requires thorough knowledge of the process to be successful. While grant funds are available, this difficulty can be a deterrent to farmers and ranchers from applying for such grants. Grant specialists in the Department of Agriculture could help our local farmers and ranchers gain access to federal funding that may be available to help them increase capacity and help the state reach its goal of increasing local food production and reducing our reliance on imports.

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-688

Submitted on: 1/26/2025 8:17:42 AM

Testimony for AEN on 1/27/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Theresa M Thompson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support 688 SB RELATING TO AGRICULTURE.

Thank you,

Theresa Thompson