

The Senate Ka 'Aha Kenekoa

STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
Thursday, November 13, 2025

RE: Testimony Regarding Agenda Items D1, D3, D4, D8, and D9

To: Chair Chang and BLNR Board Members,

Mahalo for this opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support** of **Agenda items D1, D3, D4, D8, and D9**, as it pertains to ACT 90 Land Transfers. Act 90 provides the statutory mechanism by which lands historically under DLNR jurisdiction may be transferred to the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (DAB) for long term agricultural use, subject to the mutual agreement between the agencies and in accordance with the procedural requirements of the statute. In light of this, I strongly urge the Board to adopt these proposed recommendations, as the Legislature finds they are in alignment with the State's long term strategic objectives of expanding agricultural activity, increasing agricultural viability and stewardship, transitioning land from passive management to active productivity-driven oversight, and strengthening Hawaii's food security and self-sufficiency.

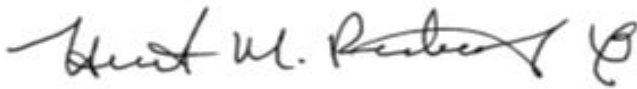
Despite the statute being 20+ years old, the full implementation remains pending: for example, as of 2024, while approximately 73,000 acres had been transferred or were planned to be transferred under the Act 90 framework, tens of thousands of additional acreage remains. The transfers proposed and presented before the board today, collectively seek to bring approximately 11,500 acres into direct agricultural use set aside under DAB. This represents a significant step in the right direction, toward fulfilling this longstanding legislative mandate. Hawaii currently has about 1.93 million acres zoned agricultural (nearly 47% of the State's total land mass), yet approximately 886,211 acres are in active agricultural use¹. This gap between zoned capacity and actual active use underscores the need to empower the agricultural sector, and lessees with secure tenure and management frameworks that are geared towards success.

Many of these parcels subject to DLNR leases have historically faced tenure uncertainty, deferred infrastructure investment, invasive species management backlogs and under-utilization. By transferring these lands to DAB, they can be actively revitalized for pasture, crop, or diversified agricultural uses, thereby contributing to food security, local economic resilience, and long-term self-sustainability goals. The Legislature has set administrative goals of doubling our local food production by 2030, increasing locally sourced food procurement, and enhancing rural economic opportunity. These land transfers will align well with these stated objectives, lowering barriers to land access and tenure, and also move towards greater local control of the State's vital agricultural resources.

¹ Penroy, R., & Collier, E. (2020). (rep.). *2020 Update to the Hawaii Statewide Agricultural Land Use Baseline; Report Prepared for the Department of Agriculture*. UH HILO

In 2022, Hawaii reported land in farms at about 1,053,302 acres (a decline of 7% since 2017), an average farm size of 160 acres, and a total farm market value of approximately \$674 million (up 20% since 2017)². These metrics underscore the need to stabilize and expand farmland tenure, and pose the immediate need to move the State towards increased productivity goals. Because sustainable agricultural productivity and conservation outcomes are dependent upon sustained engagement, it is imperative that the Board approve agenda items D1, D3, D4, D8, and D9. By doing so, the Board will ensure that the public trust is preserved, agricultural stakeholders are empowered with certainty and incentives, which moves Hawaii towards greater self-sufficiency, increased agricultural economic activity, and sustained access to land stewardship and tenure. Therefore, I strongly urge the Board to make the wise decision and move to fully adopt the proposed recommendations.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Herb M. Richards III", followed by a stylized mark that looks like a circled "B" or a flourish.

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² USDA. (2022). (rep.). *2022 Census of Agriculture Hawaii State Profile* United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), National Agriculture Statistics Services (NASS), Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDOA).