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SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT
Monday, March 11, 2024 — 1:00 p.m.

Ulupono Initiative strongly supports HB 2134 HD2, Relating to Agriculture.

Dear Chair Gabbard and Members of the Committee:

My name is Micah Munekata, and I am the Director of Government Affairs 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 HB 2134 HD2, 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 state departments or agencies who can apply for funding to support local initiatives. Establishing a position at the DOA for this work is extremely timely, not only to meet the needs of local farmers and ranchers, but also due to the funding that has been made available by the federal government.

The return on investment for the State can be substantial and transformative. 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. Similarly, Ulupono believes that the State should strongly consider general funding DOA grant writers as they will be well worth the investment, and result in millions of dollars in federal funding to further support the State's agricultural efforts.

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,

Micah Munekata
Director of Government Affairs

Attachment

Investing in a Sustainable Hawai'i

THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE REQUEST THAT WILL *BRING MORE MONEY TO HAWAI'I*

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. The HDOA's operating budget request is \$300,000 in general funds for three currently vacant full-time employee (FTE) positions. Filling these positions follows through on legislators' requests to maximize existing positions toward legislative intent.

HDOA's Ask

HDOA is requesting funding for three existing grant writer positions to be dedicated to securing block and competitive federal grant programs.

- **Examples of block grants:**
 - USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant program (\$500,000)
 - USDA Farm and Ranch Stress Assistance Network program (\$500,000)
 - USDA Micro-Grants for Food Security program (\$3.0 million)
 - USDA Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (\$3.2 million)
- **Additional grants:**
 - Federal State Marketing Improvement Program (\$250,000)
 - Multi-State Specialty Crop Block Grant (\$500,000)
 - Community Wildfire Defense Grant (\$5 million)
 - Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (\$1 million)

Why Grant Writers?

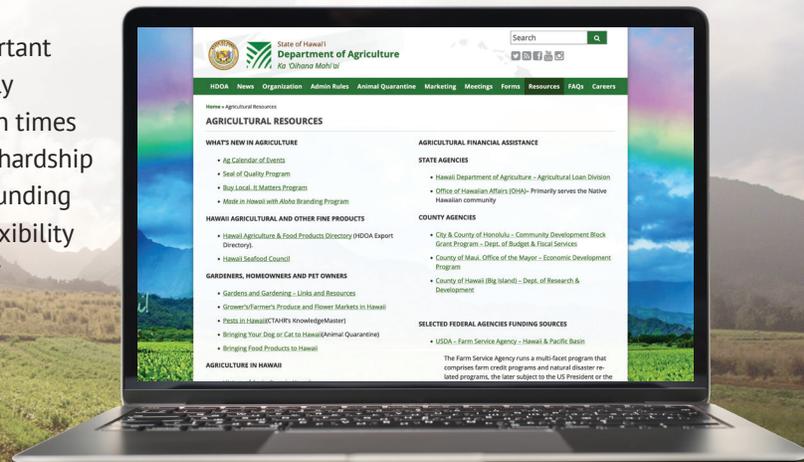
Based on these few examples, this \$300,000 investment could secure \$13.95 million in funding (46.5x return on investment) with more funding available.

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



THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE REQUEST THAT WILL BRING MORE MONEY TO HAWAII

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 Hawaii'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.

- The Kohala Center, O'ahu Agriculture & Conservation Association, and Hawaii Farm Bureau invested \$1.4 million in grant writers over the past 10 years.
- 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.

Ulupono's Support of Maui Wildfire Efforts

After the Lahaina wildfire, the Hawaii Wildfire Management Organization (HWMO) to support its efforts helping other organizations apply for more than \$60 million from the USDA Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG) program, including the Departments of Land and Natural Resources and Hawaiian Home Lands, non-profit organizations and homeowner's associations.