



**DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS,
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM**
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMOHALA PĀ'OIHANA, 'IMI WAIWAI
A HO'OMĀKA'IKĀ'I

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TESTIMONY OF DANE K. WICKER
Deputy Director
Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism
State of Hawai'i

Before the
Board of Land and Natural Resources

In Support of Agenda Item D-6
Acquisition and Transfer of Lands Associated with the Wahiaiwā Irrigation System
March 13, 2026

Aloha Chair Chang and Members of the Board:

The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) respectfully **supports Agenda Item D-6**, which implements the State's acquisition and coordinated transfer of lands associated with the Wahiaiwā Irrigation System (WIS) pursuant to Act 218, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2023.

Act 218 reflects the Legislature's recognition that the Wahiaiwā Irrigation System is critical agricultural infrastructure necessary to sustain farming operations in Central and North O'ahu. The Act directs the State to acquire key components of the system and ensure that irrigation services continue to support agricultural production and the long-term viability of these agricultural lands.

The Wahiaiwā Irrigation System includes the Wahiaiwā dam, reservoir, and ditch network that provide irrigation water to farms in the Wahiaiwā, Waialua, and Hale'iwa agricultural regions. The system historically served thousands of acres of agricultural lands and multiple farming operations producing a diverse range of crops including bananas, papaya, mango, and other diversified agricultural commodities.

An economic impact study conducted for the State found that irrigation delivered through the Wahiaiwā Irrigation System is a foundational infrastructure component supporting agricultural production in one of O'ahu's most productive agricultural regions and that agricultural operations in the region depend on the continued availability of this irrigation supply.

Agenda Item D-6 represents a critical step in executing the Legislature's directive under Act 218 by authorizing the coordinated transfer of lands and infrastructure to the Department of Land and Natural Resources and the Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC), ensuring that the irrigation system can continue to serve farmers while supporting the State's agricultural and natural resource objectives.

This action also directly supports the statutory mission of the Agribusiness Development Corporation under Chapter 163D, Hawai'i Revised Statutes, which directs ADC to:

- Promote diversified agriculture in Hawai'i
- Facilitate the productive use of agricultural lands
- Develop and maintain agricultural support infrastructure necessary for agricultural viability

Irrigation systems such as the Wahiawā Irrigation System represent precisely the type of agricultural infrastructure that Chapter 163D envisioned when establishing ADC. Access to reliable irrigation is one of the most critical factors determining whether agricultural lands remain productive and whether farmers are able to invest in diversified crop production.

Beyond implementing Act 218, this effort aligns with broader statewide agricultural planning initiatives now underway.

ADC is currently working with the University of Hawai'i College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) to conduct commodity mapping and crop suitability analysis across Hawai'i. Through CTAHR's crop suitability maps, the State is identifying agricultural lands and irrigation systems that can support specific crops and agricultural commodities most effectively.

This data-driven approach helps identify which lands should remain in agricultural production and which irrigation systems must be preserved or modernized to support long-term agricultural productivity.

These efforts directly advance the policy objectives established by the Legislature through Act 151 (2019) and Act 175 (2021), which call for strengthening Hawai'i's food systems, improving agricultural infrastructure, and increasing local food production capacity.

The acquisition and coordinated management of the Wahiawā Irrigation System therefore represents more than a transfer of lands and infrastructure. It is a strategic investment in Hawai'i's agricultural economy, food security, and economic resilience.

By preserving this irrigation infrastructure and ensuring that it remains available to farmers, the State is protecting one of the key systems that enables agricultural lands in Central O'ahu to remain productive for generations to come.

For these reasons, DBEDT respectfully urges the Board to approve Agenda Item D-6 and allow the State to proceed with implementing the Legislature's directive under Act 218.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued leadership in stewarding Hawai'i's agricultural and natural resources.



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Submitted via e-mail to blnr.testimony@Hawaii.gov

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF LAND AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Kalanimoku Building
DLNR Boardroom
1151 Punchbowl St.
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

March 13, 2026
9:00 a.m.

Testimony on Agenda item D6: Acquisition of Private Lands Associated with the Wahiawā Irrigation System as Provided for in Act 218, 2023 Session Laws of Hawaii for Addition to the Wahiawā Freshwater State Recreation Area Identified as Tax Map Keys; 2) Rescission of the Wahiawā Dam Remediation Schedule issued to Dole Food Company Hawai'i by the Board on April 9, 2021, upon Transfer of certain Tax Map Keys to the Department of Land and Natural Resources and to the Agribusiness Development Corporation, including the Wahiawā Dam and the Ditch System Associated with the Wahiawā Irrigation System; 3) Delegation to the Chairperson to Negotiate the Terms and Conditions of the Transfer Agreement; 4) Delegation to the Chairperson to Enter into the Transfer Agreement; 5) Issuance of Management Right-of-Entry to the Division of State Parks; and 6) Issuance of Set Aside to the Division of State Parks for Addition to the Wahiawā Freshwater State Recreation Area for Park Purposes.

Aloha Acting Chairperson Kanaka'ole and Members of the Board:

I am Brian Miyamoto, Executive Director of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau (HFB). Organized since 1948, the HFB comprises 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 strongly supports the State's acquisition of the Wahiawā Irrigation System pursuant to Act 218, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2023.

The Wahiawā Irrigation System is critical for O'ahu farmers and ranchers who depend on it for their operations. Water availability is a basic necessity for farmers and ranchers to maintain and expand production, particularly during periods of drought and increasing climate variability. A reliable and affordable supply of irrigation water is also a key factor when farmers are deciding whether to start new agricultural operations or expand existing ones.

For decades, the Wahiawā Irrigation System has provided an essential source of water to agricultural lands in Central and North O‘ahu, including Waialua and Hale‘iwa. Farmers in these regions grow a wide range of crops, including cabbage, bell peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, kalo, eggplant, okra, papaya, citrus, avocado, banana, dragon fruit, watermelon, and green onions. Continued access to irrigation water is necessary for these farmers to remain viable and to help Hawai‘i increase local food production.

The Wahiawā Irrigation System, currently owned by Dole Food Company, was previously listed for sale, raising concerns about the future availability and affordability of irrigation water for farmers. No individual farmer or agricultural operator can reasonably afford to purchase and maintain a large irrigation system of this scale. If the system were acquired by a private entity with no commitment to agriculture, there is a real risk that water rates could increase substantially or that water delivery could be discontinued entirely, putting agricultural operations and local food production at risk.

Act 218 recognized the importance of this system and appropriated funding to allow the State to acquire, repair, and maintain the Wahiawā Irrigation System and associated infrastructure. State ownership will help ensure that this critical water source continues to support agriculture and that the system can be maintained and managed in the public interest.

Securing long-term access to reliable irrigation water is essential if Hawai‘i is serious about strengthening food security, supporting farmers, and expanding local agricultural production. The acquisition of the Wahiawā Irrigation System represents an important step toward achieving those goals.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of Agenda Item D-6 and for your continued support of Hawai‘i’s farmers and ranchers.



HAWAII CROP IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

Submitted via e-mail to blnr.testimony@Hawaii.gov

Meeting of the Board of Land and Natural Resources
March 13; 9 AM
Kalanimoku Building; DLNR Boardroom

RE: Testimony on Agenda item D6: In Support

Aloha Acting Chairperson Kanaka'ole and Members of the Board:

The Hawai'i Crop Improvement Association (HCIA) writes **in support** of the State's acquisition of the Wahiawā Irrigation System pursuant to Act 218, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2023.

The Wahiawā Irrigation System has long played a critical role in supporting agricultural operations in the region, supplying water to productive farmland that contributes to Hawai'i's food security, agricultural research, and diversified crop production. State acquisition of the Wahiawā Irrigation System will help ensure that this vital infrastructure remains available to support agriculture and other public benefits into the future.

Bringing the system under public stewardship will provide greater long-term stability, enable coordinated management and investment in infrastructure improvements, and help prevent potential disruptions to water access that could adversely affect farmers and the broader agricultural economy. Moving forward with this acquisition represents an important step toward protecting critical irrigation infrastructure and ensuring that agricultural users in Central and North Oahu continue to have reliable access to water.

For these reasons, HCIA respectfully urges the Board of Land and Natural Resources to approve the proposed acquisition. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support.

The Hawaii Crop Improvement Association is a Hawaii-based non-profit organization that promotes modern agriculture to help farmers and communities succeed. Through education, collaboration, and advocacy, we work to ensure a safe and sustainable food supply, support responsible farming practices, and build a healthy economy.

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March 13, 2026

Subject: Testimony on Item D-6: A Approval of: Acquisition of Private Lands

Associated with the Wahiawā Irrigation System as Provided for in Act 218, 2023

Session Laws of Hawaii for Addition to the Wahiawā Freshwater State Recreation

Area Identified as Tax Map Keys (1) 7-3-001:003 and 019; 7-3-006:023; 7-3-

007:001; 7-3-008:001; 7-3-010:003; 7-3-011:003, 006, and 007; 7-3-012: 006; 7-

4-001:003; and 7-4-012:001,

Aloha Acting Chair Kanaka‘ole and Members of the Board:

The Hawaii Agriculture Research Center is writing in strong support of the approval of the acquisition of private lands associated with the Wahiawā Irrigation System as provided for in Act 218, Session Laws of Hawaii 2023. HARC is the recipient of the Waiahole Ditch system and knows the value of having a sustainable water supply provided by the state with a long term commitment.

Just as the Central Oahu farmers have a reliable water source, so too do the farmers and ranchers of the North Shore. These are the areas on Oahu with large land area commitments to our state’s diversified agricultural industry and need now to be matched with the water commitment. The Agribusiness Development Corporation possession and management of the Wahiawā Irrigation System will play that vital role in water commitment allowing agricultural entities to make long term farming plans. The water source and land over which it transverses is vital and an essential component of any irrigation system to be managed properly.

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This commitment will support the viability of a potential agricultural corridor having all the necessary needs for the industry to succeed: land, water, labor, transportation and marketing. O‘ahu growers with the fate of this system secured into perpetuity will now be able to expand agricultural production and provide for some of the badly needed import replacement. We cannot afford to lose this critical water source. Thank you for allowing HARC to submit testimony.

Michael Lurvey

Phoenix Carbon LLC

[EXTERNAL] Strong Support of Acquisition of the Wahiawā Irrigation System

From Scott Ing <farmloan808@gmail.com>
Date Wed 3/11/2026 3:59 PM
To DLNR.BLNR.Testimony <blnr.testimony@hawaii.gov>

March 11, 2026

To: Chairperson and Members
Board of Land and Natural Resources
State of Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources

Chairperson and Members
Agribusiness Development Corporation
Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism

From: Loan Lovan / Lovan Taro Farm

BLNR Hearing Date: March 13, 2029

ADC Hearing Date: March 19, 2026

Aloha Chairs and Members,

I am writing in strong support of the State of Hawai‘i’s immediate acquisition of the Wahiawā Irrigation System, which is scheduled for consideration by the Board of Land and Natural Resources and the Agribusiness Development Corporation at their respective hearings noted above. The system represents one of the most critical pieces of agricultural and water infrastructure on O‘ahu, and its continued public stewardship is essential to advancing Hawai‘i’s goals for food production, food security, flood risk reduction, and watershed management.

Food Production and Food Security

The Wahiawā Irrigation System has long supported agricultural activity across Central O‘ahu and remains foundational to the region’s ability to produce food locally. As Hawai‘i works to reduce its dependence on imported food and strengthen local supply chains, maintaining reliable access to irrigation water is essential.

Public acquisition will help ensure that agricultural lands remain viable for diversified farming, local producers, and future agricultural innovation. The system provides the water

backbone necessary to sustain farming operations that contribute directly to local food supply and economic resilience.

Supporting this acquisition is therefore a direct investment in Hawai‘i’s long-term food security and the stability of its agricultural sector.

Flood Protection and Watershed Management

The Wahiawā Irrigation System also plays a critical role in managing water flows across the broader watershed. Through its reservoirs, ditches, and control structures, the system helps regulate runoff and reduce downstream flooding risks in Central and North O‘ahu during heavy rainfall events.

In the context of increasing climate variability and more intense storms, maintaining this infrastructure under coordinated public management is essential for protecting communities, agricultural lands, and public infrastructure while supporting watershed health.

Coordinated Public Stewardship

Consideration by both BLNR and ADC reflects the system’s dual importance as both natural resource infrastructure and agricultural backbone. As ADC operates within DBEDT’s broader mandate to support economic development and agricultural viability, public ownership enables coordinated management that can align:

- Agricultural productivity and farmer access to water
- Flood mitigation and stormwater management
- Watershed restoration and conservation priorities
- Climate resilience planning
- Long-term infrastructure maintenance

Ensuring that the system remains functional and accessible will provide lasting benefits to farmers, communities, and the environment.

Conclusion

The Wahiawā Irrigation System is a legacy of Hawai‘i’s agricultural history that continues to serve a vital role today. Its acquisition represents a forward-looking investment in food security, watershed stewardship, and community resilience.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge both the Board of Land and Natural Resources and the Agribusiness Development Corporation under DBEDT to support the acquisition, close on the transfer as soon as possible, and to recognize the system as essential infrastructure for the future of agriculture and water management in Hawai‘i.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully,
Loan Lovan
Lovan Taro Farm LLC