

From: [Jeni Herberger](#)
To: [Planning LPC Testimony](#)
Subject: Written testimony Bill 147
Date: Thursday, June 25, 2026 1:25:12 PM

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Leeward Planning Commissioners,

My name is Jeni Herberger, and I am a Hawai'i Island resident, farmer, and hosted vacation rental operator. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony on Bill 147.

I am submitting testimony to both the Leeward and Windward Planning Commissions because this issue is critically important not only to individual operators, but to farmers, rural landowners, and residents throughout Hawai'i County.

I understand and support the County's efforts to address concerns related to investor-owned vacation rentals, absentee ownership, and housing availability. However, I respectfully ask that the County make a clear distinction between absentee investors and local residents who live on, work, and steward their properties — especially those of us operating on agricultural land.

I live on my agricultural property and have legally operated a hosted vacation rental for approximately 15 years while paying all required GET and TAT taxes. My farm produces roughly 6,000 pounds of avocados annually, supplies culinary herbs to the local market, and supports livestock, including sheep and chickens. Like many small farms in Hawai'i, agriculture alone does not generate enough income to sustain rising property taxes, insurance, maintenance, labor, and production costs. Hosted accommodation income is what allows me to continue farming, maintain the land, and remain a resident farmer.

This agricultural component is essential. Working farms often rely on diversified income streams to survive. Hosted accommodations and bed-and-breakfast operations on agricultural properties can be a responsible and necessary part of that model when the owner lives on site, operates lawfully, pays taxes, and manages the property responsibly.

I respectfully urge the Commission and County Council to ensure that existing lawful hosted accommodations and B&B operations on agricultural properties are clearly grandfathered in. Farmers who have followed the rules, paid taxes, operated responsibly, and built their livelihoods around existing County allowances should not be placed in a position of uncertainty or gradually regulated out of existence.

I also ask that the implementation process be clear, practical, and fair for agricultural properties. Any new permitting, registration, renewal, or compliance process should recognize the difference between a resident farmer operating a hosted accommodation on working agricultural land and an absentee investor operating a transient rental property. These are fundamentally different uses with very different impacts.

Each year I host approximately 200 guests. These visitors support our local economy by shopping at farmers markets, booking charter fishing trips, dining at local restaurants, and utilizing local tour operators and small businesses throughout Big Island. The economic impact extends far beyond my property and directly supports the same local economy and agricultural community the County seeks to strengthen.

I find it difficult to reconcile the County and State's strong support for local agriculture with policies that could unintentionally undermine the financial sustainability of small farms. We are encouraged to "Buy Local," participate in the Hawai'i Seal of Quality program, improve food security, and pursue agricultural grants and initiatives. Yet the reality is that many small farmers cannot survive on agricultural income alone. If Hawai'i truly values local food production and working agricultural lands, County policy must recognize the economic realities farmers face.

I respectfully urge you to support regulations that target problem operators without jeopardizing resident-owned, tax-paying, working agricultural properties that have been operating legally and responsibly for years.

Mahalo for your time, consideration, and service to our island community.

Respectfully,

Jeni Herberger

Hawai'i Island Resident, Farmer, and Hosted Vacation Rental Operator