

Thriving, Diverse, and Regenerative Economy – Agriculture and Food Systems

Public Comment Summary

County of Hawai'i Draft General Plan 2045

The public comment period for the Draft General Plan 2045 was held from September 18, 2023 to April 1, 2024. This comment summary contains the key themes derived from community feedback on the Thriving, Diverse, and Regenerative Economy – Agriculture and Food Systems section of the draft plan.

1. Support for Local Agriculture and Sustainability

Comments emphasize the importance of supporting local agriculture through property tax revisions, incentives for sustainable practices (e.g., green waste programs and local fertilizer production), and support for local farmers and their livelihoods. Proposals include tax incentives for important farming practices, investment in regenerative agricultural practices, and maintaining agricultural tax policies favoring family farms.

2. Agricultural Policy and Regulation Amendments

A number of comments focus on the need to revise regulations and policies to benefit agriculture, including amendments to agricultural infrastructure, grubbing and grading ordinances, tax policies, and streamlining processes for leasing government-owned land and fishponds. Transparency in planning and local government involvement is also called for.

3. Clarification and Language

Several comments call for clearer language in agricultural and environmental policies, requesting specific changes to terms like 'forestry', 'producers', 'ranchers', 'agricultural worker', and proposing adding or replacing terms for clarity and accuracy.

4. Environmental Conservation and Cultural Values

Comments reflect on the importance of conserving the environment and maintaining cultural values through initiatives like protecting forest strips, replanting native trees, practices involving Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and providing tax incentives for kalo farmers.

5. Economic and Resource Management Concerns

Concerns regarding regressive tax policies affecting family farms, the high costs of pesticides, fertilizers, and dealing with pests and weeds are highlighted. The economic challenges faced by local farmers and the impact of tax policy on the viability of farming as a livelihood are emphasized.

6. Infrastructure and Resource Accessibility

There is a clear call for better infrastructure to support agriculture, such as water cooperatives, amendments to accommodate building materials for agricultural facilities, and the creation of Agricultural Improvement Districts.

Comment	Page Number (in the online Konveio platform)
KS comment (Actions 42.k & 42.n): Innovative policies supporting farmworker housing should help project feasibility, resulting in more affordable farmworker housing and local food production.	176
KS comment (Policy 42.5 & Action 42.h): These policies could help build a sustainable forestry industry and address climate change while supporting local economies.	175
KS comment (Policies 9.5, 10.5, 10.7, 10.9, 10.10, 29.12, 41.13): This policy directly aligns with Kamehameha Schools' goals and objectives and could help the County achieve its housing, energy, food production, economic, etc. goals.	173
KS comment: This section bolsters and diversifies agricultural enterprises, encourages innovation and technology adoption, supports value-added processing, and promotes market access for local producers.	170
.m Amend Hawai'i County Code to include provisions for suitable agricultural infrastructure projects financed by County bonds and liens on real property of participating agricultural stakeholders, whether such assessments on TMKs involve contiguous parcels of lands encumbered under an "Agricultural Improvement District". (CODE AMENDMENT I PD I phase 1) p. 175 "TMK" should be defined.It is unclear if the meaning is "whether or not"	176
Evaluate grubbing and grading ordinances as they pertain to agriculture including the creation of exemption categories for water storage and aquaculture. (CODE AMENDMENT I PD I phase 1) p. 175 Our inadequate grubbing and grading ordinances should be strengthened, not weakened. This proposal could increase erosion, floods, and smothering of coral reefs by runoff	176
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42.g Amend bulk regulations including building materials for agricultural facilities and infrastructure. (CODE AMENDMENT I PD I phase 1) p. 175 The plan should specify proposed amendments.	176
42.9 Support the continued operation of the USDA's Daniel K. Inouye U.S. Pacific Basin Agricultural Research Center facility. p. 174 "USDA" should be defined.	175
Increase interagency coordination, programs, and policy initiatives that improve local agriculture infrastructure. Policies 42.1 Support the creation of water cooperatives supported with financial sources, such as CFDs. p. 174 "CFO" should be defined.	175
Section 8: Agriculture and Food Systems p. 169 This should be section 7, since it is a higher priority.	170
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add in "long-term" after "streamlined"	175
replace "to" with "for" change "prevent" to "prevention, early detection, rapid response, and control of"	174
replace "farm labor" with "agricultural worker"	173
add in "and rotational grazing to improve soil health and sequester GHG" after "(GHG) Emissions"	173
add in "and labeling" after "branding" add in "meat, fish, and other" after "local produce"	173
add in "cattle," after "flowers/foilage/landscape"	171
add in "enhances the flow of ecosystems services from our working lands" after "economy"	171
add in "and ranch" after "farm"	171
add in "and Painolo" after "agricultural"	171
add in "ranchers" after "farmers"	171
Replace "producers" with "ranchers, processors"	171
add in "These businesses and organizations are all dependent upon good management of the natural resources on which they depend, not only for their benefit as agricultural [business] enterprises but more importantly for the long-term health and future productivity of these resources for the benefit of both the broader community and future generations who continue to be the boots on the ground stewarding these precious resources" after "forestry"	171
Mandates for regenerative practices and green waste amendments could impose additional costs and operational challenges for agricultural and real estate sectors.	174
This is massively important to the success of agricultural efforts on Hawaii Island. Farmers need direct, immediate access to their crops at all times. Often, ag lots are in areas that are far away from where farmers live, resulting in insurmountable obstacles in the face of events like natural disaster, or times of drought or high pest pressure. Farmers should be allowed to live on the land they farm to mitigate these and other obstacles.	173
Add: 41u Support and invest in cultural food programs, including preservation	175
Add: 41.t Establish tax incentives for kalo farmers to support Indigenous food ways and food security for Hawai'i County.	175
Add 41s Support and advocate for streamlined lease applications and programmable environmental impact statements to further streamline processes for leasing government-owned fishponds	175
change to, "Support and invest in regenerative agricultural practices and restoration involving Traditional Ecological Knowledge systems and practices through revitalization of the ahupua'a system, restoration of ancient lo'i and loko'ia, with decision-making through leadership of culturally-informed land stewards, agriculturalists, scientists, etc. to advance and perpetuate cultural practices and food security".	173
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One, if not the biggest obstacle to farms is County regressive tax policies aligned against family farms. Farmers should be treated as they were prior to the Great Recession. Then you could freely develop your small farm as a self sustainable family farm and consume and sell food with family, friends, neighbors and the general public. Your primary residence was treated the same as any residential primary residence when it came to taxation. To incentivize food growing, the farmed portion of your land received favorable tax treatment with reduced assessments. Deana Sako, then head of the County Tax Dept claimed farmers were cheating residential property owners because the farmers could have lowered taxes on the part of their farm that they produced food on. She convinced the County to eliminate dual tax breaks for locally owned farms. The end result is that farmers have a Hobson's choice. Take the tax break on your home and then your land assessment has no tax break and is sky high due to the ongoing gentrification occurring on the Island. So there is no point in farming, ergo no food. Or, take the ag exemption on your farmed land and your home assessment skyrockets. Either way, you will be taxed right off your farm. There is NO incentive now to farm. In fact, County tax policy is extremely regressive towards local farmers and ranchers. Farmers, for the most part, are forced to work full time outside of farming just to support the farm rather than the farm supporting the farmer, his family friends and the community.	173
I don't agree with this. This places people with potential private interests in charge that might not get water to everybody who needs it. IE what's happening with Tim Richard and this Kohala Ditch Co-op, while several majority landowners on ditch have bought up easements. Stuff like the ditch, should be maintained by the State.	175
How about a simple checklist with supporting documentation instead of vague PD memos?	176
Already noted support for this earlier in the document. This could really be key for some of our larger existing agricultural enterprises to build housing for their workforce.	176
Priority! Without data how can we plan? Partner with USDA, State DOA, UH or other resources to get this done quickly and updated regularly.	176
This could be an important initiative to create a circular economy and reduce building costs	175
Invest in a crop suitability tool, including existing and projected water demand	174
Emphasize access to materials - E.g pest management, labor needs, etc. -emphasize agriculture innovation -need local research capacity to help transition ag industry (CTAHR) include advocacy language -Support opportunities for emerging agricultural commodities such as cacao. (branding is vital)	171
The forest strip between the highways thru Panaewa Forest were intended to maintain a forest look, so do not clearcut that forest strip, or replant with native trees and flowers.	172
Consider to add a program to support the production of value-added products via widely available commercial kitchens. Also, consider establishing slaughter houses on island.	175
I love seeing this on the GP! Farmers need more support because it is very difficult to make ends meet by farming.	174
how do we revitalize our dairy and poultry industries?	176
Dealing with pests (insects/pigs/diseases) and weeds drive up the cost of ag due to high costs of pesticides and added labor. Not sure what the solution is here, but some kind of help to reduce the problem or cost of remedying the problem could be helpful. Fertilizer costs are also extremely high, can we research creating fertilizer locally?	173
Replace "advocate" with "petition." Also, I support these (41.a and 41.b) priorities. We need to facilitate green waste programs to reduce the amount of waste going into our landfills, especially with our only landfill nearing capacity.	174

Replace "advocate" with "petition"	174
Replace "advocate" with "petition" or add	174
Already done but changes do need to be evaluated for effectiveness.	175
This goal seems vague	173
too many ands in this sentence	173
some other key words here might be: innovation, education, and entrepreneurship	173
A more realistic goal might be to "strategically address food security"	173
missing pronoun	176
ADC	176
Add the term "forestry" to the list of ag-related activities.	173
1. What does elimination of food deserts mean? 2. Expanding the Hilo green waste mulching service to Keaau would be great.	173
Many homeowners grow food on their land for feeding their families, extended ohana, neighbors and friends, yet the latest revisions to agricultural lands property tax does not acknowledge this important sustainability practice. These property tax revisions should be revisited with this practice in mind and help to incentivize more of this culturally important sustainability practice.	173