

# THE INDEPENDENT VOICE

Newsletter of the Kona Coffee Farmers Association

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## Letter to the Editor

There is a convenience store chain in the northeast that sells lots of coffee, Wawa. They claim on their website to sell over 125 million cups a year.

I recently counted 84 coffee pots in a large Wawa. One is labeled Kona. I asked the coffee manager if it is 100% Kona or a blend. She wasn't sure but asked the store manager, who said she thinks it's a blend. I asked, "don't you think you should label it "Kona blend" instead of just "Kona"? She didn't understand my question.

I have long contended that the real competition to gourmet coffee shops is not Starbucks, but the Wawas, 7-11's, and other convenience stores. When a person buys a cup of "Kona" coffee from a Wawa and finds it's no better than any other cup, you can be sure he will never, ever pay \$28 a pound for the real Kona.

*Robert L. Badgett.*

Editors note: Robert is the Editor of About Coffee. Read his article at [www.aboutcoffee.net/2008/01/wawa-is-convenience-store-chain-in.html](http://www.aboutcoffee.net/2008/01/wawa-is-convenience-store-chain-in.html)

## Advisory Board

KCFA Board Member Nancy Griffith attended the Governor's West Hawaii Advisory Board Meeting on January 16<sup>th</sup>. Here are some highlights from her report, thank you Nancy.

**Country of Origin Labeling:** Discussion on the HDoA getting a trademark for the name Kona, and about Cool (Country of Origin Labeling). Rick Vidgin said we need to get the word out, lobby, lobby and lobby more. He said the coffee

farmers gave the Kona name away when they agreed to allow 10% blends to use the Kona name as their identity. He's right, I believe.

**GMO Coffee:** Una Greenaway gave a powerful presentation against GMO coffee field tests that will surely cross-pollinate with coffees already growing here. She noted that the HDoA and Legislature do not agree with her position and hopes her testimony would change things.

**Green Coffee Imports:** There was a question about green coffee imports, fumigation by methyl bromide, possible importation of coffee from India, the need to protect our honored Kona name. This led to my speech about 90% foreign un-graded, un-inspected coffee being put into bag with 10% Kona coffee and being labeled Kona Blend. Most of the panel 'got' it. I told them that our coffee is mostly from heritage trees, that it is the signature crop of our island and the state, that it has been an export product for 150 years, that King Kalakaua issued a decree in 1882 that no foreign coffee plants could be imported into the Kingdom of Hawaii. This, along with our sunshine and soil, is a major factor in the identity and quality of Kona Coffee.

**Invasive Species:** Neil Riemer gave a well illustrated and no nonsense talk about invasive species. I got the distinct impression that the HDoA is seriously, woefully short handed and basically inadequate in both inspecting and responding to invasive species' threats. Their main technique is to find a biological agent that will prey on and kill the invader. They have to find the killer bug and then test it for effectiveness and possible harm to existing Hawaii ecology, a process that usually takes years. Right now they are working on the Varroa mite that attacks honeybees, little fire ants, coqui frogs, and fireweed.

## Workshops....

By popular request, we will be repeating our **Drying & Storage Workshop**, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, at CTAHR. Look for our email announcement.

Our Pruning workshop was, as always, a great success. Many thanks go to Henry Williams for hosting it at his farm in Keauhou mauka.



And of course to Bob Smith, we are lucky to have a resident expert so willing to share his knowledge.

## Legislative Issues...

Our ongoing campaign to get our Big Island legislators support continues. We are asking them to support HEARINGS on our Truth in Labeling Bills. Look for our ads in West Hawaii Today, and overleaf.

The Senate Ag & Hawaiian Affairs Committee met last Tuesday to hear testimony on SB2905. This is a Bill introduced to fund the Legislative Reference Bureau to do the study of Truth in Labeling that was the result of last year's deliberations. Last year they tasked the Department of Agriculture (HDoA) to do the study but never provided funding for it.

Editors note: the KCFA position is that the study was a delaying tactic by the blenders to keep the status quo, avoid open hearings on SB661 which has been buried in committee since last year; and that money on a study could be spent more wisely on other issues. Now they are asking for funding to justify the study and keep the status quo another two years.)

## Legislative Issues continued...

Written testimony in support came from HDoA (if no impact on their budget), Hawaii Farm Bureau (HFB), Hawaii Coffee Co (HCC), and the Hawaii Coffee Association (HCA).

Written testimony in opposition came from The Hawaii County Council, KCFA, and thirteen individuals (farmers and roasters).

The testimony is on line. [www.capitol.hawaii.gov](http://www.capitol.hawaii.gov), click on Bill Status and Documents, enter "SB2905" and check "show testimony", and click to open.

Oral testimony in favor came from the HDoA Bill Pierpont, HFB Alan Takemoto, HCA Jim Wayman, HCC James Lenhart, and Gloria Bivens who read a statement from Dave Bateman on behalf of the Kona Coffee Council. The essence of the Bateman statement: KCC supports raising the minimum % in Kona blends as long as no segment of the "coffee industry" would be adversely impacted.

Main thrust of Jim Wayman's presentation was that a change in labeling would cause huge economic impacts and that change shouldn't be made without understanding those impacts. He has proprietary Nielsen data that showed that 62% of the coffee sold in Hawaii was sold by two companies (presumably HCC & Hawaiian Isles). He said that HCC sells 55% and that the vast majority of that is blend; about 30% of the coffee sold in the state is blends, and 40% of that is sold to hotels & restaurants. Overall he was making a case for economic activity, regardless of other factors.

Oral testimony in opposition was made by Hawaii County Council Leg. Liaison Ralph Boyea, KCFA President Bruce Corker, and Chuck Moss coffee farmer. The message of these testifiers was that we need to stop consumer fraud and the degradation of the Kona name, and that waiting for a study is not a reason to maintain the fraud. The Legislature should have open hearings on SB661, the Truth in Labeling Bill, which has been stuck in committee for over a year.

Ken Takayama of the Legislative Reference Bureau (LRB) held no position, but estimated the cost of the study at more than \$600,000. Sen. Kokubun questioned Takayama and in essence said if LRB is not interested in doing the study they would look for another researcher. Takayama made it clear that LRB had no enthusiasm for doing the study.

Sen Kokubun sharply questioned Pierpont and said he (Kokubun) had understood the HDoA had done nothing because there was no appropriation. Pierpoint said that HDOA had consulted with stakeholders (in the case of KCFA he mentioned that he had attended our Annual Meeting last month), and that an interim report would be ready within a couple of weeks. But that the economic impact study could not begin until there was funding. HDoA has discussed this with UH. UH estimate is 150,000 to 200,000 for the economic study which they would probably contract out. Sen Tokuda critically questioned Bill Pierpont on only having informal contact with the stakeholders, and the fact that HDOA had not put in a supplemental request for budget to conduct the SCR102 study.

Sen. Calvin Hee gave a long and lively statement in opposition to a study. It is not a complicated issue; fix the fraud, require truthful labeling; and let the market work it out. Don't waste money on a study. Address the issue. Hee mentioned that he had family with a coffee farm in Holualoa, and had visited there as a boy. Protect the name of the farmers' crop. Sen. Slom also joined in on the waste of money on an unneeded study theme.

The vote: 2 yes votes--Tokuda and Kokubun; 1 yes with reservations--Gabbard; 2 no votes--Hee and Slom; absent--English. Passed with amendments. We will have to wait to see how the relatively informal discussions are specifically reflected in the amended bill.

## Join or Renew Now...

The Kona Coffee Farmers Association was founded to protect and promote 100% Kona coffee, and to support and provide an independent voice to the farmers who grow Kona coffee.

We are a member-driven organization and encourage member input at all times. Regular membership is \$25, Associate (non-farmer) membership is \$20. This gains you free entrance to our workshops, so is a great deal.

Find information and join online at [www.konacoffeefarmers.org](http://www.konacoffeefarmers.org)

**Dear Big Island Residents & Coffee Lovers-**

Your Hawaii County Council last November unanimously passed Resolution # 417-07. This asked the State Legislature to have public committee hearings and to enact the Truth-in-Coffee-Labeling legislation (HB72, SB661). This legislation will put an end to 90% foreign coffee being called "Kona blend".

On January 15, in support of the Council, the Kona Coffee Farmers Association sent letters to all 10 Big Island legislators asking that they publicly call for open committee hearings. We did not ask them to support the Bills at this time, we are only asking for them to support that the Bills be publicly debated. Here are their responses so far:

RESPONDED--IN SUPPORT: Sen. Lorraine Inouye; Rep. Josh Green. Thank you, Lorraine and Josh for your commitment to open government.

RESPONDED--IN DISCUSSION: Sen. Russell Kokubun; Reps. Cindy Evans and Clift Tsuji

NO RESPONSE: Sen. Whalen; Reps. Chang, Herkes, Hanohano, and Takamine

We will continue to ask our Big Island representatives, and we ask you to also contact them to have them support HEARINGS, and please sign our on-line petition.

*With aloha,*

To sign our truth-in-labeling petition, please visit us at [www.petitiononline.com/75Kona/petition.html](http://www.petitiononline.com/75Kona/petition.html)

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**KONA COFFEE FARMERS ASSOCIATION**