

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE

Newsletter of the Kona Coffee Farmers Association

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Contents

Coffee Laundering.....	1
Kona Brewery Award.....	1
PBN Friday.....	2
Chocolate Festival.....	2
Red Fire Ants.....	2
GMO Coffee Bill.....	2
Coffee Petition.....	2
Membership Information.....	2
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Coffee Laundering - Legislature Washes Its Hands of the Issue

Coffee laundering – It sounds extreme, but how else to describe the practice of importing foreign coffee beans, fumigating them with methyl bromide, mixing them with 10% Kona beans, and re-labeling them as “Kona Blend”? And this practice that deceives consumers and destroys the good name of Kona, is going to continue. Rep. Clift Tsuji from Hilo, chair of the Agriculture Committee, refused to give a hearing to Bill HB72, which would require that the Kona Blend name can only be used if a blend contains a minimum 75% Kona. Sen. Russell Kokubun, also from the Big Island and Chair of the Senate Water, Land, and Agriculture Committee, similarly refused to give a hearing to an identical bill (SB661) in the Senate.

The legislators’ attitude is puzzling. They seem not to care that our visitors continue to be deceived by this practice. At a time legislators are actively seeking protections for Hawaii-made products in general, they didn’t even give let us be heard by the committee.

Associated Press writer Mark Niese, stated, “From macadamia nuts to colorful lei and Kona-labeled coffee, several agriculture imports are the target of proposals aimed to protect authentic Hawaii ingredients from products masquerading as island-grown. All these bills are moving ahead in the state Legislature with broad support except

for the coffee bill, stalled by disagreements within the local coffee industry.”

Our legislators told KCFA “the other side made a better case”, which is troubling as no hearing was held for us to MAKE a case. So how are the blenders so successful at talking to our representatives, yet we can’t even get a hearing for the Bill?

Is it the “shell game” the blenders play? They claim we want to “increase the blend percentage”. Let’s get it clear.... All the Bill would change is the use of the name Kona Blend on a product that is 90% fumigated foreign coffee. Just blend as they do now, but call it “paradise blend” or whatever. If, as they say, this blend is what their customers want, then their customers will buy it no matter what the name. If their customers don’t buy it without Kona on the label then that proves that customers were deceived.

Or is it the “must protect the small farmer” rhetoric? It is stretching credibility that a big corporation that wants to buy coffee at the cheapest price is the defender of a farmer who wants to sell at the highest price. If the Hawaii market wasn’t flooded with 5 million pounds of basically foreign coffee labeled Kona blend then there would be more visibility for real Kona. More visibility equals more sales equals higher demand equals higher prices.

Perhaps it is the myth that the market will collapse? They threaten that blenders in Hawaii will stop buying Kona coffee for blends if they can’t continue to launder their foreign coffee by relabeling it Kona Blend. And that will cause a “glut”. Well, here is that myth-buster. The State’s import figure for foreign green coffee is around 4.5 million pounds. To mix that 9:1 with Kona coffee needs 1/2 million pounds of Kona, which is about 15% of the Kona crop according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service. 15% is about the tip on a restaurant check. We

know we can sell an extra 15% of Kona coffee, even if the blenders stopped making 10% blends completely.

Why SHOULD our legislators stop this coffee laundering?

It is so deceptive that even the famous Consumer Reports did not know Kona Blend was 90% foreign coffee. Does Hawaii want to be known for tricking tourists with foreign knock-offs?

It is damaging the famous Kona name. Once our reputation is gone, prices will drop, and farming coffee in Kona will become uneconomic, families will not be able to make a living.

Kona coffee is a huge tourist draw. What chance the success of the wonderful Kona Coffee Cultural Festival if Kona coffee is no longer produced?

This legislative season will pass with another success for big business over the farmers. But we will be back next year, and every year until our legislature does the right thing and protects our signature agricultural crop.

Kona Brewery Award

KCFA had a great day at the BrewFest. As well as serving coffee samples to the sold-out crowd, we presented a Certificate of Excellence to the Kona Brewery for their superb beers using 100% Kona Coffee.



Kona Brewing Co President & CEO, Mattson Davis at the mike; KCFA President Ken Sheppard shakes hands with Rich Tucciarone, Vice President of Brewery Operations.

Da Grind Buzz Kona Coffee Imperial Stout was brewed especially for the Kona Coffee Festival. Pipeline Porter combines the best of the Big Island, a rich and roasty porter and 100% Kona coffee, and is available October through March.

We are proud of our Kona Brewery and its contributions to our community through the Beer Fest and other activities.

PBN Friday Features Kona Coffee

The popular and informative show, Pacific Business News Friday, hosted by Howard Dicus, has been featuring the labeling law and other Kona coffee issues. March 2nd saw opinions from John Langenstein and Roger Kaiwi from the Hawaii Coffee Association. March 9th featured Christine Sheppard and Suzanne Kustusch from KCFA. March 16th will be CTAHR Extension Agent Virginia Easton-Smith.

Our thanks go to Howard for giving this important issue time to be aired in a substantive way. If you miss the original airing on Friday evenings, you can watch it again on Oceanic's News On Demand (Channel 110).

Chocolate Festival

Join us for the celebration of chocolate. at the 6th Annual Kona Chocolate Festival Gala Benefit, 6:30pm – 10:00pm, Outrigger Keauhou Beach Resort, on Saturday March 24th. Live music, chocolate body art, silent auction, regional chocolate competition, and of course wonderful KCFA coffee served at our booth. Tickets at konachocolatefestival.com

Fire Ants On The Move?

A fascinating, and alarming, report on Little Fire Ants was given at the Amy Greenwell Ethnobotanical Gardens by Merritt Walsh, Pest Survey and Response Technician, Big Island Invasive Species Committee.

Wasmannia auropunctata, or the little fire ant as it is commonly called, is new to Hawaii, and spreading. It started in Puna and spreads easily in potted plants

or plant material. It is known for its painful stings, and considered to be perhaps the greatest ant species threat in the Pacific.

There is a serious risk of them being brought to Kona, especially in plants bought from or originating in east Hawaii nurseries. Nurseries, fruit tree orchards, and ornamental plants are all potential habitat for the LFA.

The Little Fire Ant is very small, 1/16 inch, and has a long lasting fire-like burning sting; a sting that is far out of proportion to its size and leaves dollar size welts. In infested orchards, the ants are predominant on the leaves, around fruit, and on the trunk, making contact between the ants and workers unavoidable. Orchard workers either refuse to pick those orchards or need premium wages to do so. It may sting and even blind domestic pets such as cats and dogs.

The only treatment for the ants so far is toxic chemicals which cannot be used in coffee orchards.

If you suspect you have seen a little fire ant, or you want more information, contact Merritt Walsh at 808-217-6206, merritt@littlefireant.com.

GMO Coffee Bill Passes House and Goes to Senate

On Tuesday March 6 the Hawaii State House of Representatives passed HB1577, (introduced by Rep. Mele Carroll), which prohibits the outdoor planting and outdoor field trials of GMO coffee in the state of Hawaii.

HB1577 previously passed both the Energy and Environmental Protection Committee, chaired by Hermina Morita and Consumer Protection and Commerce Committee, chaired by Bob Herkes. The vote on the House floor was 45 ayes and 4 nos with 2 excused.

“The coffee bill HB1577 is a reasonable, fair and prudent bill, which will help to protect the vibrant Hawaii coffee industry from the contamination that other crops in the U.S. have been affected with.” said Una Greenaway, from the Coaliton to Protect Hawaii Coffee and an organic Kona coffee farmer. “We applaud the foresight of

the Hawaii State Representatives to behave in a proactive manner to control the risks that could devastate an industry's markets. The coffee industry in Hawaii, is a 175 year old industry. There are over 600 small family farms in Kona alone that could be affected. We say mahalo to the legislature.”

The Bill now crosses over to the Senate. Make sure you are on our mailing list and we will email you when to send testimony in support.

Coffee Petition Close

Our petition in support of HB72 has closed with nearly 1800 signatures

A quick read through some of the comments clearly illustrates that our farmers and customers understand the issue at stake.

From Beth Ann Webb of Kona, “I do understand the need to have blends, but it is false advertising to put Kona on the bag when the coffee in the bag is not really Kona to any extent. In the long run, this practice will diminish the ability of Kona farmers to obtain a fair return on their investment. Kona coffee is one of the most distinctive products of Hawaii, so why should the legislature not work hard to protect its unique identity.”

From Janet Anglin of California, “Keep Kona coffee unique; don't make it a commodity. I've heard comments from Kona blend drinkers that say the coffee tastes just like the stuff they buy in cans at home”.

Read the petition comments at www.PetitionOnline.com/75Kona/. And thank you everyone for your support of our farmers.

Membership

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. The KCFA goals are to help all of our member farmers succeed in their farming business and enjoy participating in an organization that represents their interests..

Find information and join online at www.konacoffeefarmers.org