

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1104

April 15, 2013

The Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-0002

Re: Area-wide Pest Management Program to address the Coffee Berry Borer

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

I write to ask for your urgent assistance in establishing an area-wide integrated pest management (IPM) program to address the serious threat to Hawaii's coffee industry posed by the Coffee Berry Borer (*Hypothenemus hampei*), an insect from Africa.

The Kona coffee industry, where the outbreak is currently concentrated, produces one of the world's premier coffees. This coffee is produced in more than 700 small family farms in the Kona area of the island of Hawaii. The Coffee Berry Borer (CBB) was first identified in Kona in late 2010; since that time, the insect has multiplied rapidly and the damage is so extensive that many farms cannot be commercially harvested. Abandoned coffee fields are a source of insect population increases so the situation keeps getting worse. We need to quickly get control of this situation and prevent the spread of this pest to other coffee producing areas on the islands of Kauai, Maui, Molokai, and Oahu.

USDA and the Hawaii Department of Agriculture have provided some financial assistance to locally established groups—the Hawaii Coffee Berry Borer Task Force and Synergistic Hawaii Agriculture Council (SHAC)—that are trying to eradicate and prevent the further spread of the CBB. The microbial control agent *Beauveria bassiana* has shown promise in controlling the pest but its use is uneven, and its cost is an issue with many of the farmers.

It is clear we need a scientifically based, coordinated approach to addressing the impact of this pest. The Pacific Basin Agricultural Research Center (PBARC) in Hilo, an ARS facility, would seem to be the appropriate locus for such a coordinated effort. Working in cooperation with the Hawaii Department of Agriculture, the Hawaii Coffee Berry Borer Task Force, and the various coffee producer associations, USDA, with its expertise in integrated pest management, could make a tremendous difference. A previous area-wide IPM program aimed at exotic fruit flies was extremely helpful and has significantly increased yields and marketability of fruit.

As you know, Hawaii receives a relatively small share of federal funding for agriculture. And because our farmers grow crops not grown in other states, we cannot, for the most part, borrow research from other states. This is an instance where USDA assistance could make the difference

between the survival and failure of a key heritage crop (produced in Hawaii for more than a century and a half), which has significant economic and cultural importance.

I ask that USDA establish, as soon as possible, a CBB Area-Wide Integrated Pest Management Program based at PBARC in Hilo. Based on previous experience with the exotic fruit fly suppression program, I ask that you plan to provide assistance for three to five years with a budget of \$1 million per year.

Given the sensitivity of Hawaii and the Pacific to introductions of new invasive pests, having the capacity at PBARC to develop and deploy IPM programs addressing new pests would be invaluable. One quarter of species listed under the Endangered Species Act are endemic Hawaiian species. One of the key threats to survival of these species is the introduction of alien invasive species. Once an alien invasive plant, insect, disease, or other organism makes it to Hawaii, control is very challenging because we don't have a cold season or the natural predators that would keep these species in check.

It is essential that this effort not detract from other critical work being performed at PBARC to support other crops and our floral and foliage industry. Farmers and producer groups greatly value the work produced by PBARC scientists. We need to further strengthen this institution so it can fully realize its potential.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this issue further. Please have your staff contact my Legislative Director, Jeffry Phan (jeffry_phan@hirono.senate.gov), to arrange a meeting.

Sincerely,



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Cc:

The Honorable Brian Baenig, Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 219A Whitten Bldg, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20250

Mr. Gregory Parham, Administrator, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Jamie L. Whitten Bldg, 1400 Independence Ave, SW, Washington, DC 20250

Mr. Edward B. Knipling, Administrator, USDA-Agricultural Research Service, Jamie L. Whitten Bldg, 1400 Independence Ave, SW, Washington, DC 20250

Ms. Hilda Diaz-Soltero, USDA Senior Invasive Species Coordinator, National Invasive Species Council, 1201 Eye Street, NW, 5th Floor, Washington, DC 20005

Mr. Vernon Harrington, State Plant Health Director, PPQ APHIS, 300 Ala Moana Blvd,
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The Honorable Russell Kokubun, Chairman, Hawaii Board of Agriculture, 1428 South King
Street, Honolulu, HI 96814

Ms. Cecelia Smith, President, Kona County Farmers Association, P.O. Box 5436, Kailua-Kona,
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Mr. Greg Stile, President, Hawaii Coffee Association, 15 Wailau Place, Lahaina, HI 96761

Ms. Stefanie Delmont, President, Kona County Farm Bureau, P.O. Box 2341, Kealahou, HI
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Mr. James 'Kimo' Falconer, President, Hawaii Coffee Growers Association, P.O. Box 10428,
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Ms. Vivian Landrum, President/CEO, Kona-Kohala Chamber of Commerce, 75-5737 Kuakini
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Mr. Ken Love, Executive Director, Hawaii Tropical Fruit Growers, P.O. Box 1162, Captain
Cook, HI 96704

Mr. Sydney Smith, President, Maui Coffee Association, P.O. Box 1089, Kula, HI 96790

Ms. Donna Woolley, The Kona Coffee Council, P.O. Box 2077, Kealahou, HI 96750

Mr. Eric Tanouye, President, Hawaii Floriculture and Nursery Association, P.O. Box 4400, Hilo,
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Mr. Orlando Manuel, President, Hawaii Papaya Industry Association, P.O. Box 6959, Hilo, HI
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Mr. Rodney Yonemura, Management Consultant, Synergistic Hawaii Agriculture Council, P.O.
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