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United States Department of Agriculture

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Office of the Secretary  
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Mazie Hirono  
United States Senate  
330 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Hirono:

Thank you for your letter of May 1, 2015, cosigned by your colleagues, recommending that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) assign \$1.3 million to fund Coffee Berry Borer (CBB) integrated pest management activities in fiscal year (FY) 2015. I apologize for the delayed response.

I share your concerns about the agricultural and economic impacts of CBB. The Areawide Mitigation and Management for Coffee Berry Borer Control project was designed to help coffee growers address the problem in ways that are environmentally sound and economically viable. The program was established at the Daniel K. Inouye U.S. Pacific Basin Agricultural Research Center (PBARC) in Hilo in August 2013 with ARS funds and in collaboration with the University of Hawaii at Mānoa, and was expanded in 2014 to include Puerto Rico, where lessons learned across the two island areas will help improve control strategies.

USDA is committed to protecting Hawaii's coffee crops. In addition to the Areawide CBB project, ARS has devoted more than \$5 million to fighting CBB in Hawaii since 2012 (\$1.44 million in FY 2013, \$1.84 million in FY 2014, and \$1.84 million in FY 2015). In FY 2014, the ARS location in Hilo received an increase of \$370,000 for CBB research; those funds are now part of the base budget for PBARC. In addition, I am pleased to announce that the Areawide Mitigation and Management for Coffee Berry Borer Control will again receive \$1 million for research in FY 2015 that will occur in Hilo (through PBARC) and Puerto Rico (through the ARS laboratory in Beltsville, Maryland).

Although the FY 2016 budget request does not contain a specific line item for Coffee Plant Health, it proposes a continuation of the \$1.84 million in existing funding for CBB. Additionally, the budget proposes the continuation of funding for the ARS Areawide Pest Management Program, which is designed to support developing coordinated control strategies for critical pests in the United States that require management on an Areawide basis.

CBB has taken a dramatic toll on the Hawaiian coffee industry, and I agree that USDA must continue our vigorous efforts in cooperation with the State of Hawaii and the coffee growers to manage, control, and eradicate this noxious pest. ARS scientists are currently working with Hawaii State Cooperative Extension personnel, all Hawaiian coffee associations, the CBB Task Force, and the Synergistic Hawaii Agriculture Council (a consortium of three Hawaiian agricultural industry organizations), to promote widespread distribution of the results of this work.

The Honorable Mazie Hirono  
Page 2

Again, thank you for your letter. Should you have any questions about USDA's efforts to control CBB, please have a member of your staff contact Todd Batta, Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations, at (202) 720-7095.

A similar letter is being sent to your colleagues.

Sincerely,

  
Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary