

# THE INDEPENDENT VOICE

Newsletter of the Kona Coffee Farmers Association

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## Editorial: The Labeling Dispute – A Little History

Yes, Kona coffee farmers really have been fighting this fight for 14 years! One of the early defenders of 100% Kona Coffee, Les Drent, produces The Coffee Times. Check out his very informative website at [www.coffeetimes.com](http://www.coffeetimes.com). Below are some quotes but anyone with a serious interest in understanding the labeling dispute should read his articles in full.

"Since the first issue of Coffee Times rolled off the press in April 1993 I pledged to myself to do everything possible to bring awareness to an issue that for many years has done more harm to Kona Coffee than any other. That being the truth in labeling of one of Hawaii's few remaining agricultural commodities, Kona Coffee."

"In 1997-1998 the two longtime coffee operations and major proponents of Kona blend coffee, Hawaiian Isles and C. Brewer, decided to set up camp in the hills of Kona and stake their claim in the industry. .... It was obvious to all involved that the Kona blend coffee companies were going to try to cripple the 100% Kona coffee industry."

"These four corporations in 1994 filed federal law suits that blocked the trademarking of Kona Coffee. This trademark would have aided Kona coffee growers in their battle to combat counterfeiting.

1. C. Brewer d.b.a. Royal Kona Coffee Co\*, Honolulu, HI
2. Kona Kai Farms, Berkeley, CA

3. Hawaiian Isles Kona Coffee Co, Honolulu, HI

4. Woolson Tea & Spice d.b.a. Lion Coffee Co\*, Honolulu, HI"

*\*Royal Kona and Lion merged to become Hawaii Coffee Company*

"Hawaii County Department of Agriculture, who are so quick to enforce local coffee grading practices to ensure quality of product, talked a good show as well but did nothing to aid the farmers in their legal battle. I have an interesting question for them. What good does it do to grade a product for quality when it is legally allowed to be counterfeited and sold as a ten percent blend? It is no wonder that many say that the government in the State of Hawaii resembles the workings of a third world nation, by allowing itself to be controlled by outside interests, especially when they are driven by the power of money."

Thank you Les for your hard work in the past. The time is long past due for our Department of Agriculture to start protecting Agriculture, and our legislators to stop pandering to big company interests. We shall not flag nor fail. We shall go on to the end.

## Friends of Kona Coffee Pour Out Support

Just three days after posting a petition on line, more than 1000 people nationwide had signed on to help protect the Kona coffee reputation. The petition asks for support of HB72 and SB 661, both Bills are waiting to be heard in the Hawaii Legislature, and both call for a minimum of 75% Kona coffee in a blend before it may use the name "Kona Blend". Now after three weeks numbers are reaching the 1700 mark. See the petition at [www.PetitionOnline.com/75Kona/](http://www.PetitionOnline.com/75Kona/).

Many of the comments on line express shock that Hawaii does not already

protect one of its signature crops. Terri Fisher from Clearwater, Florida wrote, "When the average coffee drinker sees the word 'Kona', they think Hawaiian coffee. When the coffee tastes average or bad, it reflects on Kona coffee in general because people don't realize that 10% Kona content has no reflection on the Kona flavor of the coffee in the blend. 75% minimum will be much more fair to the coffee buyers and give the Kona growers even more responsibility to provide a quality, good tasting product that commands a higher (fair) selling price." Dave Thompson of Bellevue Washington wrote "By allowing these blends to be marketed as Kona Coffee the Hawaiian industry as a whole is RAPIDLY losing its credibility." Stephan Becker of Canada said "As a 'Kona' coffee lover I am absolutely devastated by the news that the Kona coffee I have been recommending to friends may not be what I thought it would be. It is paramount in my opinion to protect the original Kona name and to insure that the Kona quality will not disappear in the end because of a lack of trust from the customer side. Thank you for taking action!"

Hundreds of Hawaii residents also have signed and given their comments in support.

Hawaii is the only State that does not protect the good name of its signature crop. Famous agriculture products are well protected by other states – Napa and Somona Wines, Vidalia Onions, Washington apples, Idaho potatoes and many more.

The Bills do not ban blending of coffee, they do require that the name Kona Blend shall not be used on blends that contain less than 75% Kona. Supporters are asking the legislature to give the Bills a hearing.

## Food Security And Hawaii's Agriculture

The Senate Committee on Water, Land, and Agriculture chaired by Hawaii Island's Russell Kokubun held the first ever legislative briefing on Food Security at the Capitol.

UH Manoa's College of Tropical Agriculture Dean Andy Hashimoto seemed to be able to say what no one else had even touched upon. He reiterated that protection of agricultural land and water is paramount to the development of food security and then asked, "Who will do the farming and at what cost?" He said that cheap food and energy policies in the US are not sustainable and that Hawaii will always be the "first" to feel any consequences. He said that Hawaii cannot compete in any of the commodity markets but we can compete with a high quality branded product such as Kona Coffee. He added that more research is needed to help farmers develop these high quality products and that Hawaii lacks basic facilities to process most foods. He called Hawaii the "...canary in the coalmine" and added that there is now sufficient data to show that something will occur worldwide which will impact agriculture and Hawaii will be the first to feel the negative impacts. Will the agriculture policies of the Legislature be able to reflect that?

Seems like Dean Hashimoto sees the value in protecting Kona's name... perhaps he can persuade the legislature to do so.

## GMO Coffee Bill Passes First and Second Hearings

Some good news from our Legislature! HB1577 which seeks to impose a five-year moratorium on open-field production of genetically modified coffee survived a first hearing in the Committee on Energy and Environmental Protection. In a second hearing amendments were made to the penalty section, but the Bill again passed this hearing.

The Committee reported "The Kona coffee industry contributes significantly to the economic and cultural vitality of

Hawaii. There is a strong desire to maintain the unique brand identity and the market price of Kona coffee, which is a highly regarded specialty coffee. There is substantial concern that permitting genetically modified coffee in the Hawaii market will lead to a substantially reduced market price and erode the niche that Kona coffee, as a specialty coffee, enjoys.

This bill would make genetically modified coffee illegal in Hawaii except for certain research purposes and provide for penalties for violations. These measures would protect the Kona coffee industry, and Kona coffee farmers in particular, support Kona coffee's status as a specialty coffee, and permit a five-year period to evaluate the importance and the extent of research of genetically modified coffee under state regulation."

It now goes to the Consumer Protection Committee where Rep. Bob Herkes will hear it on February 21st. Call toll-free 974-4000 to express your support.

## NASS Coffee Statistics

The National Agricultural Statistics Service has released its preliminary figures on the 2006 coffee harvest. It lists Kona as having 630 farms covering 3,350 acres, 88% of the island of Hawaii's coffee acreage. The harvest is expected to be down by 40% over last year, due primarily to dry spring weather during flowering. Green production for the 2006/7 season is just 2.5 million pounds compared to just over 4 million pounds last year.

## KCFA March Events

Spring ramps up with three events in March where we will be providing samples of our special 100% KCFA coffee. We will also be selling the donated member coffee under the KCFA label to raise funds for our other activities (Education program, Legislative, PR, etc)  
Brew Fest - March 10<sup>th</sup>  
Pua Plantasia - March 10<sup>th</sup>  
Chocolate Festival - March 24  
Please check our website for more information on these events.  
If you wish to donate your coffee, please drop off your green or

parchment coffee no later than February 28th. You may drop off your coffee at any of three locations, or you may also bring your coffee to our KCFA Board Meeting on Feb. 21st at 4p.m. and give it to Ken Sheppard.

**Drop off locations --- deadline date -- Feb. 28th**

CTHAR in Kainalu with Virginia Easton-Smith  
Ken Sheppard - 75-6153 Ho'omama St Pualani Estate, Kailua 329-7239  
Chuck Moss - 74-4993 Mamalahoa Hwy. Holualoa 329-4035

## Want To Help?

### Contact Your Representatives:

Call toll-free, Rep. Clift Tsuji (974-4000 then 68480#), and Sen. Russell Kokubun (974-4000 then 66760#) and ask them to hear the Kona Coffee Labeling bills.

### Send Testimony in Support:

To [info@konacoffeefarmers.org](mailto:info@konacoffeefarmers.org) ahead of time and when the Bill is ready for hearing we will batch send all your testimony in for you.

### Write Letters to the Editor:

Write to your favorite newspaper and let others know that support for changing the blend labeling law is support for family farms and their lifestyle so intrinsic to Hawaii and our love of the a'ina.

### KCC Member?:

Call or email to ask them to support this important legislation.

### Join KCFA:

Be a part of the only group that is actively seeking to change the damaging 10% blend law.

## Membership Information

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](http://www.konacoffeefarmers.org)