

The Independent Voice



Newsletter of the Kona Coffee Farmers Association
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April 2006

Contents

HCA Legislative Agenda.....	1
The "Coffee Industry".....	1
Let the Numbers Speak.....	2
SCAA & GMO.....	2
PS on Methyl Bromide.....	2
Membership Information.....	2

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HCA Launches Attack on Kona Coffee Farmers?

Jim Wayman of the Hawaii Coffee Association, in a meeting with Duane Okamoto, Deputy Chair of the Department of Agriculture in March, outlined the legislative agenda he wants the DoA to pursue for what Wayman calls "the coffee industry". (For more on "the coffee industry" see next article.) Several of these issues would impose crippling restrictions on Kona coffee farmers, particularly the smaller farms and the estates.

Now Wayman is urging the Kona Coffee Council to support his legislative agenda, and based on recent voting records of their new Board, it seems likely they will toe the HCA line yet again.

High on Wayman's agenda is mandatory certification of all green coffee grown in Hawaii. Current rules state that green Kona coffee

must be State certified before it is moved out of place of origin (Kona) in order to retain the Kona name. Currently, sales of green Kona that take place within the Kona borders do not require certification, and green Kona that is roasted IN Kona does not require certification.

The certification process, carried out by State officials, is a small charge per pound when certifying many thousands of pounds, and for processors the state officials come to their mill. But for the small farm, the flat fee structure imposes a large burden per pound. Plus the considerable effort of finding out when you can take your small amounts down to the State office for certification, plus there is an additional cost for each grade that you want certified.

And if you want your coffee roasted and packed by a processor as Kona, you will need to have it certified first.

For the integrated estate, there is an even more serious consideration. Now instead of being able to advertise your coffee as farm grown and processed from seed to cup, you will have to take your coffee off-farm to be certified.

Another issue he is pushing is Roasted Certification. In order to do this he has persuaded the DoA to

consider passing ownership of the State trademarks for 100% origin coffee, including the 100% Kona trademark, to the HCA. The HCA would then license the trademark to producers who would pay the HCA a fee for use of the trademark. Is it legal for the State to pass a State trademark, which presumably belongs to all coffee farmers in the State, to a private club? We don't know, perhaps someone can tell us? But it certainly does not seem ethical for the HCA to be able to charge farmers to use the trademark. Once again, the burden falls on the small farm, not on the big processor.

Why do Wayman and his cronies want this? Looks like he is beginning to see estates and small farm producers as competitors, and is using the legislature to hit Kona producers with unnecessary costs... . Contact the DoA and tell them you don't want to have Wayman's agenda forced on to you! It's time they protected the farmer, not the "industry".

The "Coffee Industry"?

As defined by the Hawaii Coffee Association means all people involved in all aspects of producing and selling coffee in Hawaii. This

includes the huge industry that imports foreign coffee to blend with Kona. In 2004 nearly 5 million pounds of green was imported, compared to a Kona production of 2.6 million included in a statewide production of 4.5 million.

Just what the DoA is doing helping an industry that has almost nothing to do with agriculture in Hawaii we cannot imagine! Jim Wayman, Legislative Affairs Chair of the HCA, heads the Hawaii Coffee Company, the largest importer of foreign coffee into the State of Hawaii. Most of his business is in foreign coffee. He does not represent the coffee farmers of Hawaii, he represents an industry based on foreign imports. The DoA should be supporting the farmers of Hawaii, those who work the land, produce and sell their agricultural product.

In Kona alone there are about 630 coffee farms, and we ARE Kona Coffee along with our local processors. Our largest customers are Hawaii Coffee Co. and Hawaiian Isle Coffee Co. Those two companies are 90% in the international coffee business and do not represent the Kona coffee product. They are merely our customers. Suppliers and customers always conflict in their goals and views; suppliers want the highest price, while customers want the lowest price.

Those two companies are in Honolulu, have daily access to the capitol, and are able to bend the ear of every legislator, something individual farmers cannot do. It is wrong for our customers to represent themselves as the voice of Kona coffee. It is even more wrong for the DoA to consider blenders as representing Kona coffee, when they should be protecting the interests of agriculture, the hard working farmers.

Let The Numbers Speak

According to NASS (National Agricultural Statistics Service), the value of last year's Kona coffee crop was \$15.5 million. The value of all coffee grown in Hawaii was \$24.3 million, so Kona provides 65% of coffee value to the State coffers.

There are 630 coffee farms in Kona, 80% of the State total of 790. Kona coffee farms support entire families and their workers, they are not the huge mechanized agribusinesses as on Kauai and elsewhere in the state.

Add to that the completely uncounted and unconsidered value of Kona coffee to tourism and to Hawaii's image. Even the White House has acknowledged Kona coffee, serving Kona RainForest Farms coffee (congratulations Howard and Stephanie Conant) at the National Governors Association White House dinner. As freelance writer Joel Berliner told the Washington Times, "Kona is the Napa and Sonoma of coffee, and it's good to know that the White House is now more mindful about serving and identifying this extraordinary American grown product in the same way as they do premium California wines."

SCAA & GMO

The Specialty Coffee Association of America, at its annual meeting in April hosted a panel on GMO and organic coffee, and presenting for Kona was Melanie Bondera of Kanalani Ohana Farm. The session was so popular that the panel had to move mid-session to a larger meeting room, and it was requested that a panel entirely on the GMO issue be planned for next year.

The SCAA has come out with its recommended statement on GM

Coffee, that is expected to be ratified at its June meeting.

*The SCAA defines coffee quality as: Quality in the Cup
Quality of Life and
Quality of the Environment.*

Current research on genetic engineering of coffee, including controlled ripening and decaffeination is not consistent with this definition of quality. The apparent risks and costs of this technology to the cup quality of specialty coffee, as well as to the social and environmental conditions under which coffee is grown, do not justify SCAA support of current research on the use of GMOs in the cultivation of coffee. While the SCAA is not in the position of providing the scientific expertise to prove such risks, currently the presence of any benefits to the industry have not been demonstrated, and do not warrant SCAA support of current GMO coffee development.

PostScript on Methyl Bromide

Following last month's issue on green imports into the State that are treated with Methyl Bromide (MB), which depletes the world's ozone layer and has been linked to convulsions, coma, neuro-muscular and cognitive problems – the Bush administration is making plans to ensure that MB remains available through 2008 by winning more treaty exemptions.

The US signed the Montreal Protocol to phase out MB by 2005. But its exemptions now allow it to use more MB than 2 years ago.

Isn't it time to face up to our responsibilities to the world and to Hawaii's coffee farmers, and BAN green imports into Hawaii?

And with it the use of MB.

Membership Information

The KCFA is a volunteer, non-profit, community-based

organization of coffee farmers with the mission to promote and protect the economic interests of Kona coffee farmers who grow and sell 100% Kona coffee and to seek greater legal protection of the Kona coffee name.

To apply, fill out the Application Form on our website,

www.konacoffeefarmers.org. Or call Nancy Griffith at 328-2666.

Meetings: The KCFA Board meetings will be held at CTAHR on the third Wednesday of each month at 4 PM.

A Special Membership meeting will be held at 3pm April 23 at the Old

Kona airport park. The meeting will consist of a brief meeting with member communications/input and a potluck social event immediately after. All farmers and their family are invited to attend.