

# THE INDEPENDENT VOICE

Newsletter of the Kona Coffee Farmers Association

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"Coffee is like the wine of the morning. It really does have the individuality and personality of wine."  
Brian Speckman – master roaster of Tully's Coffee Company in Seattle - From the Seattle Times

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## Editorial

I wish the legislative season were over so that this newsletter could contain articles of practical use and information. But it isn't, and the Resolutions now going through the legislature are seriously worrying for the small farmer.

Resolution HCR110 would enforce mandatory green certification of every bean grown in Kona before you can roast and sell it. Don't we currently have certification? Yes, but it's only mandatory for green coffee that is shipped out of origin (ie: leaving Kona before it is roasted). If you farm in Kona, sell your green coffee only in Kona, or roast your green before it leaves Kona, then you are exempt.

The exemption is to protect the small estate farmer from the prohibitive costs of certification, which the HDoA do on a time/labor cost basis, not a per pound basis. In effect you would have to pay the same amount to certify your three bags of green as a major processor getting 3 pallet loads certified. Your cost per pound would be around a dollar whereas the major processors cost is literally cents per pound.

Why is this mandatory certification being proposed? We do not know. Rumors abound of "deceptive practices", "off-grade coffee being sold as Kona", but when questioned as to specifics one, including the inspection branch of the HDoA, has been able to produce a single documented case of uncertified Kona being found to be below the quality standards for Kona.

The main mover behind this appears to be Jim Wayman of the Hawaii Coffee Company, who, because he roasts on Oahu, has to certify his Kona to ship it to Oahu, and says he wants to "level the playing field" and make everyone do the same. I doubt any of us is on Jim's playing field – the Hawaii Coffee Company is listed with \$28.2 million in sales and 120 employees, that's an income of \$235,000 per employee.

Lets get one thing clear: GREEN CERTIFICATION DOES NOT GUARANTEE QUALITY. It certifies for origin, and for grade if you choose, so it is a comfort zone for mainland buyers of large quantities of green, as it was intended to be. It is cupped, but not for Kona taste, only for obvious defects such as sour or musty. And our retail stores are full of questionable quality coffee that HAS been certified, questionable because it has no roast date and may be stale.

The winners of the Cupping Competition, year after year, are small farms that grow, process and roast their own coffee right here in Kona, to order. It upsets some processors so much that Roger Kaiwi of Captain Cook Coffee suggested that the Gevalia organizers divide the competition into small, medium, and large categories. If processors need to have their own category so they can win, maybe they should be looking to their own quality instead of forcing burdensome, expensive bureaucracy on small farmers. It is either a contest of the best-of-the-best or it is pointless. Let the processors compete on the same "level playing field" as the small farms.

Small estates win their customers one-by-one, know them, and keep them due to the high quality of the coffee they provide. If the HDoA can work out a system whereby a farmer can take a half-bag of green to the HDoA office, get it certified that day for the same

price per pound that everyone pays, go home and roast it for the customers, then I doubt there will be many that would complain about certification.

And if the proponents of this Resolution are concerned about quality associated with the Kona name, let them certify also the 90% foreign fumigated coffee that is being sold as "Kona Blend". If all farmers in Kona have to certify for origin and grade, then all coffee bearing the Kona name should have to be certified for origin and grade, and state so on the package.

Fair's fair – or is it in Hawaii?

The above is the opinion of the Editor – comments are welcomed at [christinesheppard@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:christinesheppard@hawaii.rr.com)

## Earth Day PuPu Party!

Mark your calendars! It's time for our quarterly KCFA Member Meeting – Saturday, April 21, 2-5pm at the Old Kona Airport Beach State Park, pavilion 1, look for our banner...

Please bring a PuPu, and **bring a friend**. The pavilion includes a bbq grill so if you want to bring bbq fixings go ahead.... We will supply soft drinks and paper goods. The park does not allow alcohol.

In celebration of Earth Day, and to raise some funds for our activities, please **bring your HI5** cans, plastic bottles and glass bottles for us to recycle. Mahalo and hope to see all of you there

## SCAA on Origin Coffee

The Specialty Coffee Association of America issued a statement in August last year on Geographic Indications for the Origin of Coffee. The complete statement can be found at [www.scaa.org](http://www.scaa.org). Here are some issues relevant to Kona and "Kona Blend" coffee.

“Specialty coffee does not come from just anywhere. Our ability to identify, with ever-increasing specificity, the source of coffee we import, roast, and brew is a hallmark of the specialty coffee industry. This, as much as any quality variable, is one of the many things that distinguish specialty coffee from coffee that is something less. Specialty coffee is not anonymous. Even when blended, the origins are often identified, and consumers have come to associate meaning and expectations with the names of coffee lands, coffee regions, coffee farms, and even coffee plants. The names of these birthplaces of coffee have value, and should be properly protected.

One hundred years ago the U.S. government recognized the value in a name when it became illegal, as part of the Food & Drug Purity Act of 1906, to “misbrand” a product as being from somewhere it wasn’t. At the time the law was written, mislabeling of coffees as originating from Java, in particular, was epidemic. More Java was sold to consumers that was ever grown, and exported from that region of the world. This contributed to the word “java” becoming one of the many synonyms for coffee. When a brand is so ubiquitous that it becomes generic, it is no longer a brand.”

Kona coffee MUST be protected for its unique origin status. “Kona Blend” is not a specialty coffee and should never be marketed as such. If the Kona name is not to become generic and lost to us we need to control our origin name.

## **GMO Coffee Bill Dying in Senate**

How could this happen? Here we have a Bill HB1577 that is supported by ALL the Hawaii Coffee industry\*. It had full industry consensus. None of the opponents of this Bill have anything at all to do with our coffee industry.

People opposing GMO coffee field trials range from opponents of GMO-anything, to people who are pro-GMO-research but recognize that it would be a marketing disaster for Hawaii’s coffees.

What UNITES all the coffee groups on this is the pure and simple fact that no one wants to buy GMO coffee. GMO coffee is NOT considered a "specialty coffee" by the Specialty Coffee

Association of America. GMO coffee can never be an organic coffee. A GMO plant derived from a Kona plant will not be Kona, which is a "heritage" plant going back 200 years. If we have GMO plants anywhere in our growing area, then we would have to test our products due to the market perception of GMO contamination. We would not be able to sell coffee to Japan and Europe or to many US markets unless it had been tested. This would be ruinously expensive and would put our industry out of business.

The main opponent of the Bill is the Hawaii Crop Improvement Association. Their President Adolph Helm told reporters "Rather than legislating coffee research, we should find compromise through discussion among farmers and the Hawaiian community, government, academia and industry with the goal of allowing farmers the option to choose their preferred growing methods". Once a GMO crop is planted in your growing area NO-ONE has a choice anymore. Cross-pollination happens and every farmer will be affected.

This Bill does not legislate on the pros and cons of GMO research. It does not even halt research in the lab. It has one very specific goal, and that is to protect the Hawaii coffee industry from loss of marketability.

We are not dealing with a theoretical situation here. John Stiles of Integrated Coffee Technologies testified at the hearings that he has GMO decaf coffee seedlings ready for field trialing next year, and wants to plant them in Hawaii. CIRAD worked on a disease resistant Coffee for Brazil a few years back, Nestle and CIRAD are working to develop a GMO coffee resistant to disease, but note their statement about it - "They chose French Guiana for the trial because no coffee grows there, avoiding any possibility that the GM variety could contaminate existing plants." Please Dr. Stiles, take your plants where coffee is not commercially grown, don't put our coffee industry at such risk.

Are we reduced to pleading with individual companies because our legislators refuse to protect the coffee industry in favor of GMO seed corn that doesn't want to have a PR problem?

Email John Stiles, Sandra Kunimoto Chair of the HDoA, Sen Kokobun, Sen

Hanabusa. Our heritage coffee deserves better at their hands.  
info@integratedcoffee.com  
hdoa.info@hawaii.gov  
senkokobun@Capitol.hawaii.gov  
senhanabusa@Capitol.hawaii.gov

\*Groups supporting HB1577  
Hawaii Coffee Association  
Kona Coffee Council  
Kona Coffee Farmers' Association  
Kona Farmers' Alliance  
Kona Pacific Farmers' Cooperative  
Hawaii Organic Farmers' Association  
Kona Kohala Chamber of Commerce

## **Education Workshop**

Our next workshop will be on May 12<sup>th</sup>, once again at Kona Mountain Coffee in Kealahou, with thanks to Bill Dwyer.

Registration and coffee at 8, then at 8:30 Bob Smith will show how to select the new growth, what to discard and why, following on from our pruning seminar earlier in the year.

At 10, Merritt Walsh, Pest Survey and Response Technician, Big Island Invasive Species Committee will show samples of the Little Fire Ants, how to distinguish them from other ants, how to treat for them. These ants have caused severe problems in coffee orchards in Puerto Rico where pickers won't work the orchards because of the severe attacks. They have now been found in the Hilo area and could be transported to Kona on plant materials and soil. Know what to look for before you get a serious infestation.

This workshop is free to all farmers. Registration is requested so we can plan for refreshments. Sign up with John McClure at [jmccclure@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:jmccclure@hawaii.rr.com) 808-328 9290

## **Membership**

The KCFA 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)