

February 28, 2013

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

and

Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

Via USPS

Re: Hawaii Coffee Industry's Coffee Berry Borer Emergency

Dear Mr. President and Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to solicit emergency assistance from the White House and the Department of Agriculture for the Hawaiian Coffee Industry that is being besieged by a new invasive pest recently introduced onto the Island of Hawaii and now threatening all other coffee growing areas of the State. As I am sure you already aware, Kona Coffee is a highly prized agricultural commodity that is grown on more than 700 small family farms, only on the Island of Hawaii. In late 2010, an exotic insect from Africa, the Coffee Berry Borer (*Hypothenemus hampei*), was first identified infesting coffee beans on the Island of Hawaii. From that initial small infestation, this invasive insect pest has increased exponentially to the level where the beetle now exists in the billions, and has infested many farms to the point where some crops cannot be commercially harvested. This has already forced some farms to close, leaving abandoned plants that further produce pests in large numbers.

Despite emergency local action programs to help combat this invasive pest, it continues to increase in destructiveness and more growers are threatened with each passing day. Both the State of Hawaii and local-based USDA Agencies have worked diligently to aid us in protecting our crops using knowledge from other countries around the world. We feel that eventually we will be able to protect our crops from this pest using some of these technologies, however, Integrated Pest Management (IPM) methods that have been effective in other areas of the world need to be quickly assessed scientifically and adjusted for Hawaiian conditions. Clearly more expertise is rapidly needed or this terrible situation is only going to get worse. This help cannot happen any too fast as this pest is continuing to increase in number and spread across all of our coffee production areas on the Island of Hawaii, and then it is only a matter of time until this insect jumps to the islands of Maui, Molokai, Oahu, and Kauai where the State's other major coffee production areas are located.

The USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) is assisting us with adapting a currently registered, powerful yet environmentally safe, microbial control agent (*Beauveria bassiana*) to help combat this pest. This type of control agent is new for us in Hawaii and more complex to use than traditional chemical pesticides and thus requires special scientific testing to adequately incorporate its use in our farming practices. They also need to assess our local isolates of this pathogen to determine if Hawaiian strains of this microbe might be both more effective and safer for our fragile environment. Additionally, 1) accurate beetle monitoring methods are needed, 2) specific action thresholds must be developed and 3) improved sanitation methods implemented across wide-areas to make these practices effective on our crops. The microbial control agent that we are currently using was originally developed by USDA-ARS scientists in Weslaco, TX during the 1990s for whitefly control. If at all possible, we request their assistance in adapting it specifically for use in our Hawaiian coffee production system. In Texas, "Mycotrol" (a specific type of *Beauveria bassiana*) was developed to control whiteflies on vegetable and melon crops. Although similar in concept, this is very different than protecting coffee beans in Hawaii and thus local adaptation is urgently needed for this method to work here.

It is our further understanding that USDA-ARS conducts Area-wide IPM programs to help agricultural industries implement highly organized and cooperative control programs for such invasive pest situations. Also, USDA-APHIS further directs Emergency Pest Response Programs to aid in monitoring, assessment and prediction of movement for such pests. These types of efforts have been used previously here in Hawaii in association with invasive fruit fly control with great success. If it is within your power, we in Hawaii request immediate assistance in developing and implementing such programs for the coffee berry borer before our industry is economically devastated. We further suggest that USDA direct the ARS Pacific Basin Agricultural Research Center (PBARC) in Hilo, HI (our closest major USDA installation), to coordinate such an Area-wide pest control effort to aid us in gaining emergency control over this problem. The IPM program can then be gradually optimized and then turned over to local grower associations for long-term management. As in other USDA Area-wide pest control projects, such an activity is expected to take from three to five years of Federal support to be effective.

With this assistance we feel that we can get our industry past this initial pest invasion and stabilize our economic and pest control situation. In the 1990s, a consortium consisting of USDA-ARS, University of Hawaii and Cornell University saved the Hawaiian Papaya industry from a similar invasive species, the Papaya Ring-spot Virus. This type of effort led by PBARC is exactly what is needed once again, only this time for an economically more significant crop, coffee. That is not to say that other Hawaiian crops are not important, indeed they are and thus USDA needs to continue to support their development and protection. To that end, we also request that you work long-term to complete the scientific program expansion at PBARC, originally started by our late Senator Daniel Inouye. Please work to complete its construction (many PBARC employees are now still housed in trailers) and staffing so that ARS scientists can continue to support both our coffee industry and all the other important agricultural commodity groups within the State of Hawaii.

It is our understanding that the Hawaiian nursery industry is also highly dependent upon PBARC and has been requesting assistance for new plant tissue culture laboratories. Such facilities will allow disease and pest free horticultural crops to be developed within Hawaii. They too are in need of increased biorational pesticides, such as *Beauveria bassiana* for thrips and other pest control, and thus completing this USDA facility and expanding microbial control research will not only help the Hawaiian coffee growers but also the wider agricultural industry within the state.


In the short-term however, we will be looking forward to hearing quickly back on what can be accomplished within the next few months in organizing an Area-wide Pest Management Program for the Coffee Berry Borer. As a Hawaii-born citizen, Mr. President, you can understand the gravity of our situation as our agricultural business sector provides our diverse citizenry with the economic bases for life here on the Island of Hawaii.

Thank you in advance for your consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,



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