

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE

Newsletter of the Kona Coffee Farmers Association

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Mandatory Certification of Green Coffee – the Debate Continues

The Quality Issue:

Howard Conant of Kona Rainforest Coffee (supplier to the White House) has been chastised by Jim Wayman for his opposition to mandatory certification of green coffee without any relief to the small farmer for the onerous fee structure.

Wayman is President of Hawaii Coffee Company, Legislative Affairs Director of the Hawaii Coffee Association, and, with Roger Kaiwi of the Kona Coffee Council, a prime mover of the push to impose mandatory certification on Kona Estate farmers.

Wayman in his email claims “Every vertically integrated farmer who uses the loophole in the processing rules to sell ungraded coffee and #3’s gives the entire industry a black eye. Also, certification of all green requires all green to be cupped by the DOA people to make sure it meets cupping standards. Someone like you takes meticulous care to make sure that your coffee meets or exceeds the expectations for the taste profile of Kona coffee. Can you guarantee me that everyone using the exemption not to certify his or her Kona is producing a good cup? It just seems to me that anyone who champions the cause of protecting Kona coffee would want to make sure cheating and poor quality are stamped out.”

The HDoA tell us that they estimate 90% of Kona coffee is certified. Thus, even if there IS any under-quality bean included in an occasional Estate farmers coffee it is hardly a big problem! And one that can be solved by education not legislation.

The HdoA also have told us that they cup only for obvious defects, such as moldy or sour, and not for “quality” or “profile”. It was the processor Kona Kai, not an Estate, selling counterfeit Kona for several years that caused the original green certification rules to be initiated.

Perhaps more to the point now is the damage being done to the Kona name by blends, which Kenneth Davids*, the renowned cupper and editor of *Coffee Review*, describes....

“Kona can’t be blamed for the indifferent quality of the three Kona Blends we sourced, given that these deceptions probably contain only 10% Kona.... Aside from the excellent Hawaiian Blend from Surf City, the Kona blends we sampled suggested that these companies tossed whatever vaguely low-acid wet-processed coffees they had around the warehouse into their faux Konas without much real commitment to approximating the subtle Kona character.”

And in *Coffee Magazine*, Davids has this to say...

“Commercial roasters produce Kona style coffee, Kona blend coffee, and Hawaiian hotels brew vaguely labeled Kona that probably consists in large part of (often low grade) Central American beans. In fact, it is difficult to find a good cup of Kona coffee in Kona, and flat-out impossible in hotels. The colorful bags of Kona coffee sold in Hawaiian supermarkets and airport gift stores are almost always poor quality and stale.”

(Editors note: But presumably were certified...)

“Vertically integrated farmers” sell by the pound to individuals, and every customer is one to be nurtured and kept. You cannot do that by selling rubbish coffee! Most every estate farmer is intensely quality-driven. It is pretty insulting of processors to imply that estates don’t produce quality coffee....

Estates consistently win the Gevalia Cupping Contest, especially organic estates, and with the small amount of coffee an estate produces it cannot afford poor quality. An estate rests on its name, and treasures every single customer, often on a personal basis. It is the best motivation for producing great coffee! Yes, Mr Wayman, we would like to stamp out “cheating and poor quality”, and the best way to do that is to stop inferior coffee blends using the name “Kona”, and major producers selling their stale coffee to tourists.

The Participation Issue:

A meeting was held at Captain Cook mill on 4/27th to discuss mandatory green certification. The HDoA sent four people to talk to a “representative group” of Kona coffee farmers and find their opinion on the issue.

Invited were a number of processors, together with representatives from the KCC and the KFA. Roger Kaiwi of Captain Cook told our KCFA delegation of five “Only Rick was invited. You’re going to have to choose ONE representative to attend. The rest of you are not welcome. You have to leave”, and he dropped the steel door to exclude them.

At that point the HDoA group arrived and our President Rick Funk complained to the HdoA that we were not being allowed to attend. Eventually two KCFA members were allowed in. Other farmers made it into the meeting and simply refused to leave when ordered out. The final count was 9 HCA, 13 KCC, and 2 KCFA. It was not possible to find out what the problem is that mandatory certification would address. Wayman said “allegedly Kau and other non-Kona coffees are being imported into the area and being processed and sold as Kona”, while Jeri Kahana from the HdoA commented that she has received complaints that off-grade coffee is being roasted and sold as Kona.

However no-one was willing to give any figures, or to say who was complaining, or to say who they were complaining about. If it is a processor casting aspersions on competitors that is one thing, if it is hundreds of customers calling from the mainland that is quite another! Without a defined problem, it is hard to find a solution, but the discussion ranged widely and no conclusions were drawn except to go away and come up with ideas and suggestions that “will make this work”. More meetings will be scheduled. Hopefully more independent farmers will be included next time.

*Read more from Kenneth Davids in the *Coffee Review* online at coffeereview.com and in *COFFEE* magazine. We like this quote from his recent review of Hawaiian coffees....

“Both Bay View Farm and Pele Plantations are Kona-based producers who roast and retail the best of their coffees themselves and sell direct to consumers. Such companies remain the best source for the finest Konas.”



To Survey or Not To Survey?

That IS the question....

The KCC and HCA are proposing that a survey study be done before any legislation restricting the use of the Kona name on coffee with only 10% in it be proposed.

The purpose of the survey is to guesstimate the effect on farmers, processors and blenders of changing the 10% blend labeling law. Blenders claim that selling 10% blends with the Kona name on increases people's desire for Kona coffee thus increasing demand. So basically are they saying "Deception may help the deceived by increasing their desire for the actual product they have been deceived of originally.?"



They also claim that blends fill a price niche considerably lower than 100% Kona. But would you buy 10% French champagne, or 10% Russian Caviar just because it is cheap? A VW beetle with Mercedes wheels is NOT a Mercedes driving experience.

According to Dave Bateman, Legislative Chair of the KCC, instead of having a study done by the HDoA, the HCA Legislative Chair Jim Wayman has chosen an author who has agreed to do a low-cost (\$70,000-\$100,000!) study by emailing out to the mail lists of various mainland coffee organizations.

To have an author chosen by the biggest blender in the State is a little like having the fox watch over the henhouse. And the cost is clearly way out of the reach of the HCA and KCC, so it seems doubtful that a study could be accomplished anyway, so isn't this just another delaying tactic to getting the legislation we need put forward? We also gravely doubt the effectiveness and fairness of an email study. In the recent HDoA study "Hawaii's Coffee Industry – Structural Change and its Effect on Farm Operations", the author Mana K Southichack PhD, stated "a low-cost survey using emails and faxes was attempted in August 2004, but the result was inconclusive due to low responses". What new techniques has the chosen author got that will produce a fair and balanced response by email?

And if there is money for a survey, this is the one we would like to see –

Are 10% blends labeled "Kona" hurting the image and sales of 100% Kona coffee, and what is the financial damage that has been done to the farmers and the image of Kona/Hawaii.

Achieving Appellation, and How to Protect It

Appellation (designation of geographical origin) traditionally applies to wine, but other agricultural products are seeking similar protection. In April the European Court of Justice upheld legal protection for production of origin for feta cheese, labeling the cheese exclusively Greek. Bordeaux has long protected its appellation which includes not only where but how the wine is produced. Meanwhile Jamaica is working hard to protect its famous Blue Mountain coffee. Industry leaders have lobbied the government to protect the reputation of Jamaica's prestigious export. Only five years ago, coffee regulators deployed undercover agents to the U.S., Asia and other key markets to identify imitations, said Norman Grant, chief executive of Mavis Bank Coffee Factory Ltd.

The coffee cops "brought back samples for us to test to provide evidence so that the coffee board could issue cease-and-desist orders," said Grant, who is one of the island's seven certified tasters. "We have a vested interest to ensure that when coffee reaches consumers that they are getting the product they expected."

Beluga caviar
Champagne
Maui onions
Parma ham
Bordeaux
Florida Citrus juice
Washington apples
Jamaican Blue Mountain coffee
Feta cheese
Napa wine
Idaho potatoes
Kentucky bourbon
Kona coffee ?

The board took some coffee vendors to court to force them to pull illegally labeled stock from store shelves and websites, Grant said. "We don't see Blue Mountain coffee as a commodity. We see it as an experience and a brand that must be protected."

Its time for Kona to be an "appellation", and perhaps we can learn from the Greeks how to do it, and from Jamaica how to protect it?

Extracted from a longer article. Courtesy The Times



Resolution for Accurate Labeling Adopted by Hawaii Democrats

On May 6th at the Hawaii County Democrats Convention in Kailua (at which 100% Kona Coffee was exclusively served to delegates) a resolution on the protection of the identity of Hawaii agricultural products was unanimously adopted.

The Resolution specifically cites the use of the Kona name on 10% blend as a deceptive misuse of the identity of a Hawaiian specialty agricultural crop, and calls for the State of Hawaii to provide the same protection to its specialty crop farmers as California has provided to Napa Valley grape growers.

While the KCFA in no way endorses a particular political party, we applaud the Democrats courageous stance, endorse the Resolution, and encourage all our politicians commodity groups, and farm organizations to do the same.

Membership Information:
Learn more and join us online.
www.konacoffeefarmers.com