



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Testimony Presented Before the
House Committee on Agriculture
Wednesday, February 17, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

By
Nicholas Comerford, Dean
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

HB 236 – RELATING TO COFFEE PEST CONTROL

Chair Hashem, Vice Chair Perruso, and members of the House Committee on Agriculture:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in strong support of the intent of HB 236 relating to the coffee berry borer (CBB). This testimony is similar to that presented for the Senate companion bill SB 855.

According to the 2018 State Agriculture overview published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Hawai'i produced 5.4 million pounds (green weight) of coffee grown on 7,100 harvested acres, with an average yield of 1.92 tons/acre, at a unit price of \$19.40/lb., for a value of \$50.16 million. These data show the high value of this crop to Hawai'i agriculture since that value is based on using just 0.65% of farm acres operated.

CBB is found in most coffee growing countries of the world and was discovered in Kona, Hawai'i in 2010. It has the potential to be a devastating disease for this industry. It is established on Hawai'i Island, and can be found now on other islands. CBB is endemic to Central Africa. It belongs to a subfamily of beetles that houses some of the most important pests world-wide. Female beetles bore into the berry and lay eggs inside the seed and the brood then feasts on the coffee seed. As this phase of the CBB life cycle occurs inside the berry and seed, it can be difficult to control.

An integrated pest management program (IPM) developed Best Management Practices to control CBB. Collaborative research has shown that sanitation along with biocontrol can be effective. Cooperative Extension Agents with the College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa have estimated pre-pandemic that about 80% of coffee farmers are familiar with the IPM program. CTAHR Cooperative Extension Agents further estimate that the IPM program has directly saved more than \$11 million in farm gate value, and saved another \$11 million in efforts to control the spread of CBB. CBB control provides the value far in excess of the cost.

The IPM program uses an insecticide (pesticide), known as a mycoinsecticide, to control the borer. A fungus, *Beauveria bassiana*, is a biological control material and is bought commercially. The Hawai'i Department of Agriculture (HDOA) was empowered in the past to develop and manage a CBB pesticide subsidy plan, allowing as much as \$600/acre for the grower. The basic approach of this bill is to maintain parts of that program into the future, until 2026.

The IPM program has been shown to be effective in the control of CBB. There is concern that without a full functioning subsidy program, efforts to apply IPM would be reduced; thereby reducing the on-farm and regional effectiveness of the strategy. A survey of coffee growers indicated that nearly 38% of growers would reduce the rate of the pesticide applied if the program was detrimentally affected. It is reasonable to assume that this would negatively affect the control and spread of CBB.

Given the estimated \$22 million/year effectiveness of the IPM program that is supported by this bill, we are in strong support HB 236 and will continue, through Cooperative Extension, to educate and train growers on the use of the IPM program.

We also understand that we are in difficult economic times and that there is much competition for budgetary matters. This program is centered in HDOA, and we defer to HDOA as to their priorities, as well as personnel and budgetary matters.