

In-coming Federal Quarantine Inspection for Alien Pest Invasive Species

One of the greatest challenges to Hawaiian agriculture is the continuing introduction of alien pest invasive species. The decline in large scale plantation agriculture in Hawaii has created an opportunity for diversified crops to contribute a greater share to the state's overall economy. This has resulted in a \$2.4B industry which is providing jobs for more than 7,300 citizens of Hawaii (Hawaiian Agricultural Statistics Service, 2004). However, the continuing onslaught of alien invasive pests is making it difficult for our farmers to remain profitable.

In a recent attempt to quantify the number of invasive alien pests entering Hawaii the state conducted the *Kahului Airport Pest Risk Assessment*. This effort included "blitz" inspections of all baggage and cargo coming into the Kahului Airport during the months of September 2000 and July 2001. These inspections revealed that 45% (125 out of 279) of the insect species intercepted were not known to occur in Hawaii. Additionally, the climate of Hawaii is extremely suitable for survival and establishment for nearly all invasive pests that are introduced.

Currently, the USDA Plant Pest Quarantine (PPQ) inspects 100% of outgoing Hawaii grown agricultural and horticultural products. A single live insect or other pest organism is cause for rejection of an entire shipment. If the shipment passes local USDA-PPQ inspection it again undergoes inspection at the destination point. Again, a single live insect or potential pest will bring condemnation and destruction or shipment back to origin, at the grower/shipper's expense. Product can be condemned despite the presence of the pest at the shipping destination. Ironically, at the same time, there is not the same level of inspection of produce and plant items coming into the state of Hawaii which has resulted in the introduction of a new alien pest species, on average, every 18 days. These new pests require increasing levels of control measures thus increasing costs to agricultural operations and, in some cases, economically crippling entire crop industries (e.g. papaya, banana).

In 2004 Hawaii Department of Agriculture – Plant Quarantine reported activity of 27,144 ship and aircraft arrivals, 4,268,559 passenger arrivals, and 13,937,820 pieces of baggage, cargo, and mail parcels. To thoroughly inspect, identify and mitigate threats, and enforce regulations without causing undo delays will require more resources. While we realize that this is a state issue our local government does not have the resources to conduct the intensive daily inspections needed to minimize alien pest species introduction and establishment. As an example of the cost associated with controlling just one alien pest introduction, it has been estimated that the cost to agriculture, horticulture, and the entire state could be as high as \$15.5 to \$46.1M per year to control just one invasive species, the red imported fire ant, should it become established (Nature Conservancy Report, 2002). The current frequency of new alien pest introductions will also, undoubtedly, continue to challenge our precious native and endangered species' ability to survive. Every day delayed in establishing a 100% incoming quarantine inspection service presents a new opportunity for alien pest species introduction and severely threatens the health of our agricultural industry and our unique Hawaiian environment. Because of this

we urgently need to establish the same level of federal quarantine for incoming produce and plant material that will help protect Hawaiian agriculture, flora, and fauna from disastrous alien pest species invasions and improve the ability of the agricultural industry in Hawaii to increase export marketing while responsibly stewarding the rare and unique species of plants and animals that can only be found in our state and nowhere else in the world.

J. McHugh
Chair, Environmental Stewardship Committee
Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation