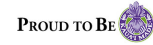




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# JFF report provides telling insights, conclusions



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Posted: Friday, March 11, 2016 12:15 am

Allan Parachini - Guest Viewpoint | **0 comments**

The long anticipated report of the Joint Fact Finding Study Group on the ramifications of pesticide use on Kauai finally emerged Thursday, offering something for both of the main sides in this controversy.

But close review of the JFF report leads inevitably to the conclusion that this type of analysis should have preceded introduction of Bill 2491, the infamous ordinance that required buffer zones and exhaustive new pesticide use reporting. Codified as Ordinance 960, it was struck down by a federal judge on grounds the state is the only entity empowered to address pesticide regulation and the county had no authority to do so — a conclusion with which the Legislature has now, for two sessions in a row, agreed.

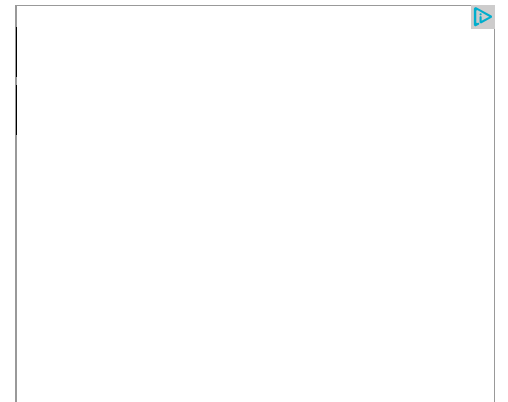
The case is currently with the Ninth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals awaiting a hearing — perhaps in 2016.

The eight-member JFF group, facilitated by Peter Adler of Honolulu-based Accord 3.0 Network, a consulting firm, spent more than six months studying available scientific and other research. In the end, the process bogged down in internal dissension and release of the draft report was pushed back from January to this week.



Nevertheless, the JFF group recognized clearly that one of the aspects of this public policy debate that's lacking is hard numbers on some very critical questions, such as whether pesticides had anything at all to do with two incidents at Waimea Canyon Middle School in which students said they were sickened, the question of whether cancer rates or birth defects on Kauai are abnormally high and whether safeguards such as buffer zones are necessary to protect the public — and, if so, what they should be.

On buffer zones, the report gave some ground to the side of this battle that argues that pesticides are a scourge that is poisoning the island. It stopped short, however, of making specific recommendations — ignoring a distance formula incorporated in Ordinance 960.



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To this, anti-pesticide individuals and organizations cheered loudly. Unfortunately, they ignored the most important and influential conclusions reached by the JFF:

w "In general, cancer incidence on Kauai was similar to or lower than that of the rest of State of Hawaii" and "Within individual census tracts of Kauai, cancer incidence was generally lower than or comparable to the corresponding incident rates of the entire state."

w "Because of the small populations involved and the lack of fully reliable and accurate health data, the information we assembled does not show that current pesticide use by seed companies and Kauai Coffee plays a role in adverse health on Kauai."

w Kauai's water supply does not show evidence of harmful levels of pesticide residue. If anything, residues often identified are the legacy of pesticides used by the sugar industry decades before the seed companies got here.

w Nevertheless, the report does make clear that, because state and federal regulations do not require testing of drinking water for some chemicals, a useful step would be for the state to require county water departments and private water companies to test for all potentially harmful substances that could conceivably be in the water supply.

w Two incidents of alleged pesticide toxicity at Waimea Canyon Middle School were found by subsequent investigations to be unrelated to seed company pesticide use. In fact, mirroring data produced for the Legislature this year, homeowner use of pesticides was responsible for all but one of two dozen school closures during the period studied.

w The seed companies and Kauai Coffee are responsible for less than 25 percent of pesticide use on the island. Structural fumigation and water purification account for the rest.

w There is no evidence that pesticide use is associated with birth defects on Kauai.

What is most important here, though, is what the report says about what is not known about pesticide use and exposure — which is, by any measure, far more than would be ideal.

The JFF's mandate limited it to reviewing existing research. There was neither money nor time to conduct new studies. This, unfortunately, forced the JFF to rely on a small amounts of research of questionable scientific competency. For example, the study references an air sampling study conducted by two political advocacy organizations, the Pesticide Action Network and the Center for Food Safety, which collected 200 air samples and found pesticide evidence in just one of them. The advocacy groups have never formally published their results.

Interestingly, among the many recommendations of the JFF are only two directly involving Kauai County. It calls on Mayor Bernard Carvalho, Jr. to start monitoring pesticide levels in county facilities like parks and roadways and to appoint a county member to the Hawaii Department of Agriculture Pesticide Advisory Committee.

On all other issues — including the really big ticket ones like revamping Hawaii's statewide pesticide regulations and inspection procedures, sampling soil for possible pesticide traces on the West side of Kauai, requiring blood samples to be provided routinely to state authorities to closely monitor effects on seed company employees, adding pesticide inspectors to state agencies and enforcing existing pesticide labeling laws statewide — the JFF addresses its findings and recommendations to state and federal agencies.

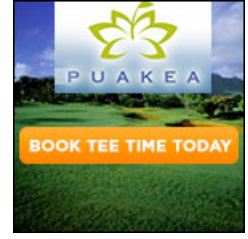
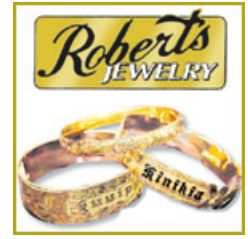
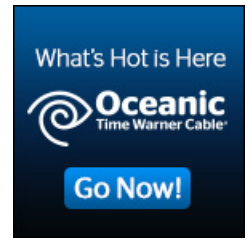
All of these make sense. If nothing else, the JFF report makes clear that Kauai's preoccupation with pesticide exposure — which is really a smokescreen for political sentiment that opposes genetically modified food — has taken root in misinformation, no information and attempts to find political advantage in vilification of the companies developing GMO seeds.

The JFF study is an intelligent and focused map of how Hawaii can improve its understanding of pesticides and enforcement of existing laws and regulations. It is beyond high time for the pesticide hysteria of Kauai to give way to fact, logic and common sense. Perhaps this report will have that result.

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**Allan Parachini** is a former journalist and PR executive. He is a Kilauea resident.

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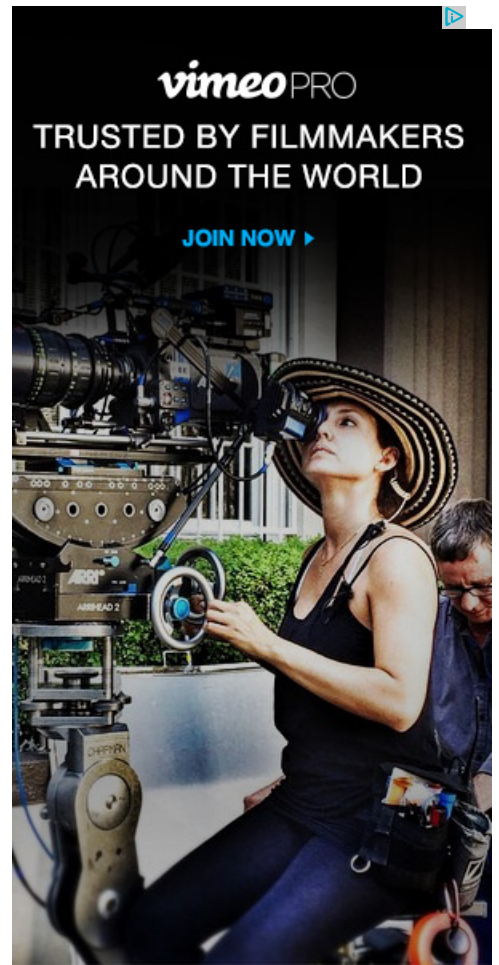


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