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Joint Fact Finding Study Group on Genetically Modified Crops and Pesticides on Kaua'i

Update #4

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1. Current Activities

The JFF Study Group has been meeting regularly and will continue to do so through the end of 2015 at which time a final report of its conclusions will be published. Before then, and when it has gathered preliminary findings and recommendations, the group will hold a public meeting on Kaua'i to receive comments that would help ensure its work is factually complete.

In the meantime, invitational listening sessions have been held with physicians and health professionals, agency officials from the Departments of Health and Agriculture and County of Kaua'i, residents from Waimea and other West side communities, and with others who hold key pieces of evidence about the agricultural and pesticide footprints of Kauai's GM seed companies and possible human and environmental health harms. Additional discussions are being scheduled with seed company officials and, at a later date, a representative from California's Environmental Health Investigations Branch, Department of Public Health.

2. Evaluation of the Good Neighbor Program

Additional funds have been received from the State of Hawai'i Department of Agriculture to support the work of the JFF group and to provide a sub-contract for the evaluation of the Good Neighbor Program (GNP). The Kaua'i Agricultural Good Neighbor Program was developed by the Pesticides Branch of the Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDOA) to provide more information and education on pesticide use on the island. Under the program, the five agricultural companies

mentioned in Kaua'i County Bill 2491 (Dow AgroSciences, Pioneer, Syngenta, BASF, and Kaua'i Coffee Company) report each month on the type of restricted use pesticides (RUP) that are applied on their fields on Kaua'i. Participating companies also agreed to implement a 100-foot buffer zone between RUP application areas and schools, medical facilities and residential properties, unless regulations by the Environmental Protection Agency proved stricter. The voluntary pesticide use guidelines went into effect on Dec. 1, 2013, with the first posting of RUP on Jan. 15, 2014, and are in addition to federal guidelines established by the EPA. The companies also file a monthly report on RUP use with HDOA's Pesticides Branch. The report is available for public viewing at the State's Open Data portal: <https://data.hawaii.gov/Health/Kaua-i-Agricultural-Good-Neighbor-Program-RUP-Use-/9pud-c8q5>.

3. *The Guardian* Article

Response to *The Guardian* Article:

Journalist Chris Pala recently visited Hawai'i and published an article in the U.S. edition of *The Guardian* titled "Pesticides in paradise: Hawai'i's spike in birth defects puts focus on GM crops" (<http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/aug/23/hawaii-birth-defects-pesticides-gmo>). I appreciated the chance to speak with him and he was most cordial. His piece will surely circulate widely on Kaua'i and elsewhere in the state where people are keenly interested in GM agricultural issues. Whatever the respective merits of the rest of his piece may be, however, the article had several unfortunate mistakes and some important omissions that need a response. This is being sent to *The Guardian*, *The Garden Isle*, and to other writers and journalists who are following the work of the JFF.

The Joint Fact Finding Study Group is not a "commission". It is a special fact-finding group composed of Kaua'i citizens who have different sets of technical, medical and scientific expertise and who volunteered to do the very hard work of thoroughly examining as much available factual evidence as is possible during a year long project. Both the State of Hawai'i Department of Agriculture and the Office of the Mayor, County of Kaua'i, jointly fund the project.

More important, the article misconstrues and conflates statements made at a meeting with some Waimea residents on August 6th by Dr. Lee Evslin, one of the nine members of the Study Group, and myself. I stated that the job of the JFF group is to gather together the best available factual information about the seed company's agricultural and pesticide footprints and any possible evidence of human or environmental health harms. In that context, I explained that we have not yet concluded our work, are not yet ready to issue findings or opinions, and are not conducting "original research".

Mr. Pala then wrote: “. . . Lee Evslin, plans to do just that. “I want see if any health trends stand out among people that might have been exposed to pesticides,” he says in an interview. “It won’t be a full epidemiological study, but it will probably be more complete than anything that’s been done before.”

As juxtaposed in Chris Pala's article, this muddled the definition of “original research” and made it appear as if Dr. Evslin is conducting research in opposition to the JFF group. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact (and this point was made clear to Mr. Pala by Dr. Evslin), the JFF group is very much on the same page and working together. All data collection efforts, examinations, and analyses are coordinated through the Study Group and a part of the broader mandate to look at critical pesticide use patterns and possible health and environment implications.

To clarify: the Study Group is a neutral forum and remains apolitical and committed to the discovery process that will lead to greater factual clarity in the sometimes difficult debates over pesticide use on Kauai. It should be obvious that part of our mandate is to look at health trends, including birth defects data, which we are doing.

Please feel free to share this with others.

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