FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

From Kona Coffee Council
RE: SB 661 and HB 72
February 1, 2007

The Kona Coffee Council does not support Bill HB 72 & SB 661, because they are poorly researched, poorly drafted and have the potential of producing many unintended consequences. We are anxious to support good legislation to increase the minimum percentage of Kona coffee in each package to be labeled “Kona.” We agree that the Kona name must be protected, and that permitting coffee containing only 10% Kona to be labeled as Kona (blend) does not fully enhance our prestigious brand.

The present Bills are unacceptable because they are arbitrary and based upon facts which have not been substantiated. Choosing 75% as the minimum allowable percentage of Kona to use the name “ Kona” is arbitrary and should be further studied to determine what the right minimum blend should be.

Proponents of the Bills allege that 85% of Kona coffee is sold as 100% Kona. This allegation is not substantiated and may be untrue. Certain processors and blenders in Kona claim that more than 50% of Kona coffee is used in blends. Accuracy on this point should be obtained before changing the blend law. These facts can only be determined by an objective scientific study conducted by professionals. We have contacted the University of Hawaii, College of Tropical Agriculture, Human Resources and Kona County Farm Bureau. The study will focus on 1) probable economic impacts on farmers, processors and retailers and 2) consumer reaction to increased pricing.

Proponents of these bills also cite the protection of other states agricultural product brands such as Washington apples and Vidalia onions. This confuses the Kona coffee issue because blending is not the issue with any of those products.

HB 72 and SB 661 also fail to provide any transition period between the present 10% Kona and the proposed 75% Kona blend requirement. Such an abrupt change will surely destabilize the market for Kona coffee cherry with unpredictable and undesirable results for more than 600 Kona coffee farmers, whether cherry prices suddenly fall or rise.

Further, should this bill become law, without a substantial phase-in period, all products then on retailers shelves will carry illegal labels.

The Kona Coffee Council is dedicated to maintaining and enhancing Kona coffee quality and strengthening “Truth in Labeling” laws.

The KCC is a non-profit Kona coffee trade organization dedicated to protecting 100% Kona Coffee. Its 317 members, mostly farmers, are presently engaged in intensive discussions to determine the best way to improve Kona coffee blend laws and truth in labeling.

The KCC supports good responsible and careful legislation to protect our name and the consumer.