

Onouli Farm wins statewide coffee cupping

Kealakekua orchard was founded more than 100 years ago

By Virginia Easton Smith, Hawaii Tribune Herald, 07/26/2009

All Kona coffee farmers should be celebrating! Kona coffee came out on top in the first statewide Coffee Cupping Competition, held July 10-11 on Maui by the Hawaii Coffee Association as part of its 14th Annual Conference and Trade Show.

Onouli Farm, a 100-plus-year-old farm in Kealakekua, was awarded the coveted first place in the state. Kowali Farm took second and Brazen Hazen Farm came in third, so all top three coffees were from Kona! Ka'u did well too; fourth and fifth place went to R&G Farm and Pavaraga Coffee, respectively.

Of the top 15 coffees, nine were from Kona, three from Ka'u, two from Maui and one from Kauai. Coffee is now grown commercially on Maui, Kauai, Oahu, and Molokai, as well as many areas of Hawaii Island.

The standard coffee cupping method used includes an exacting set of brewing standards and a formal step-by-step evaluation process. The beans are ground, water is poured over the grounds, and the liquid is tasted both hot and as it cools. The evaluation considers six characteristics: fragrance, aroma, taste, nose, aftertaste and body.

While organized by HCA, the cupping competition was run by independent, highly regarded professional cuppers who are coffee roasters and brokers from the mainland. They are Shawn Hamilton of Java City Roasters, Paul Thornton of Coffee Bean International, and Warren Muller of InterAmerican Coffee.

Lead judge Hamilton is responsible for all green coffee purchasing, roasting, production, quality and operations at Java City. He has been involved in specialty coffee since 1987 and has worked as a barista, and in packaging, roasting, quality control, coffee buying, and executive management. He is the incoming vice president of the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA).

Thornton, who has conducted several excellent roasting and cupping workshops in Kona, has been with Coffee Bean International since 1982 where he is the Roastmaster and green coffee buyer. He is a Q certified coffee cupper, and is on the Board of the

SCAA. Hamilton and Thornton are founding members of the Roasters Guild.

Muller, is vice president of trading at InterAmerican Coffee, an importer and distributor of high-quality green coffee, and has been a green bean broker for many years. He has been around coffee all his life, as his parents were in the coffee business. He is the new Pacific Coast Coffee Association (PCCA) vice president. All three judges are members of the PCCA and are active contributors to several prominent coffee industry organizations.

The competition was open to any coffee grown in Hawaii and certified by origin by the Hawaii State Department of Agriculture. Each entrant will receive a written assessment of their coffee.

There were 69 entries received from around the state, a majority of those from Kona. It was a blind cupping -- coffees were identified only by numbers and none of the judges knew which farm, or even island, the coffees were from. After an initial round, the entries were narrowed to 33 and the process began again. The top coffees were cupped several times before the rankings were determined. The judges said they were impressed with the consistently very high quality of Hawaii coffees.

The positive attention on Hawaii-grown coffees generated by the event is good for all agriculture in the state. The Hawaii Coffee Association (HCA) expressed several purposes in organizing the contest, including to promote and better understand the cupping qualities of Hawaii grown coffees, and to expose local and mainland markets to the quality and diversity of Hawaii grown coffees. The competition was cosponsored by the Hawaii Department of Agriculture.

The mission of the HCA is "to promote Hawaii as a coffee origin and to increase Hawaii coffee consumption within the state and export from the state. A major component of the HCA's work is education of the public and of members." The annual conference and trade show is held every summer at varying locations throughout the state.