Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

October 29, 2020

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Perdue:

We are writing to alert you to the recent positive identification of *Hemileia vastatrix*, the fungus that causes Coffee Leaf Rust (CLR), on coffee leaves on Maui. This is the first known presence of CLR, the most economically damaging threat to coffee worldwide, in Hawaii. In order to effectively contain and limit the spread of CLR to other areas of Maui as well as to other islands, robust resources from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and other coordinating partners are necessary to minimize the potentially devastating economic damage this fungus poses to Hawaii's coffee industry, which has a farm gate value of $54 million.

On October 21, 2020, coffee leaves from managed coffee plants suspected to be suffering from CLR on Maui were submitted to the Hawaii Department of Agriculture for laboratory analysis. In response, a survey on October 22 in the area of the original sample resulted in suspect samples being collected at three additional sites, including feral coffee. On October 26 preliminary analyses conducted by the University of Hawaii College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (UH CTAHR) on the original sample confirmed the presence of the CLR-causing fungus, which was then followed by USDA National Identification Services' official confirmation of this federally regulated pest on October 29. These findings warrant a rapid response to contain and treat the fungus in areas of known infection and monitoring for the presence of the fungus in other areas. The method by which the fungus arrived in Hawaii is unknown at this time, but left unchecked, wherever it becomes established it can decrease the following year productivity of coffee farms from between 30 to 80 percent.

Up until now, Hawaii has been spared from this fungus that has impacted every other coffee-growing region of the world, often times wiping out entire coffee farms. While the establishment and management of this fungus in other regions presents the opportunity to utilize existing science and tools to respond to the fungus, such as planting resistant cultivars, changing climate conditions have resulted in once resistant varieties to now be susceptible to CLR. Additionally, like many invasive pests, management will need to be specifically tailored to the unique conditions found in Hawaii, taking into account the specific coffee varieties grown, the soil conditions, the microclimate, among other factors.

In order to minimize the impact of CLR in Hawaii, the coffee industry will need to have a suite of tools specifically tailored to the conditions found in Hawaii at its disposal. This includes, but is not limited to, monitoring and effective quarantine strategies as well as the development of best management practices, effective chemical treatments, and resistant cultivars. The development, education, and dissemination of these tools to coffee growers will require a strong commitment of resources from USDA. As such, we urge USDA to consider providing emergency response resources such as funding set aside from the Plant Protection Act's Section 7721 program to rapidly respond to pest emergencies of high economic consequence, as well as USDA's coordination, support, and provision of other available tools and resources to state, academic, and coffee industry stakeholders in Hawaii.

Putting forward robust resources at this early stage can mean the difference between effective management and decimation of coffee farms in Hawaii. We thank you for USDA's support and response to date and appreciate your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Brian Schatz
United States Senator

Ed Case
United States Representative

Tulsi Gabbard
United States Representative