



National Agricultural Statistics Service

Hawaii Agricultural Statistics Service
Hawaii Department of Agriculture

Hawaii Kava

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Production drops due to worldwide health concerns

The Hawaii Agricultural Statistics Service (HASS) estimates farm revenues from the sale of kava ('awa) at \$69,000 in 2002, down 88 percent from 2001. Production (fresh weight basis) totaled 60,000 pounds during 2002, down 87 percent from 2001.

Worldwide production of kava was severely curtailed in 2002 when certain European countries placed restrictions on the sale of food supplements and herbal medicines containing kava and/or kava extracts. This action was taken following the November 2001 release of a German study that claimed consuming kava-based or kava-containing products can lead to liver damage. Restrictions on kava products were also eventually adopted by countries such as Japan, Singapore, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Hawaii farmers felt the impact of this ban almost immediately as sales of kava dropped significantly during 2002. Although many farmers reported slow or no sales during the year, the majority of growers intended to keep their plantings. Disease also continued to be a problem for Hawaii growers.

Recently, a team of University of Hawaii scientists traced the kava-liver problem to extracts made from the peelings of the kava plant's stem bark which contain an alkaloid called pipermethystine. Preliminary test results showed that this alkaloid had a "strong negative effect" on liver cell cultures. Normally the stem bark is discarded but as demand for kava increased in the 1990's European extractors began purchasing the stem bark peelings and using the extract in kava products. Traditional kava drinkers only use the root of the plant which does not contain the alkaloid. ■

Hawaii Kava Statistics
Number of farms, acreage, sales, farm prices, and farm value, State of Hawaii, 2000-2002

Year	Number of farms	Acreage ¹		Total sales ³	Average farm price ⁴	Farm Value
		Total ²	Harvested			
				<i>1,000 lbs.</i>	<i>Dollars per pound</i>	<i>\$1,000</i>
2000	50	80	5	85	1.40	119
2001	65	70	35	450	1.30	585
2002	55	50	15	60	1.15	69

¹ Includes kava inter-planted with another crop. ² As of December 31. ³ Fresh weight basis. Dried kava ('awa) sales were converted to a fresh weight basis by multiplying by five. Includes all types of sale, including organic. ⁴ Represents average farm price for fresh sales.

Economic Effects of the Ban on Kava by European and Other Countries

The restrictions resulted in the loss of kava export earnings from the region and particularly the four major kava-producing FICs namely, Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu to the European markets and to the USA. This has caused considerable loss of exports and falls in the domestic price of kava, resulting in declining incomes for farmers and businesses. In Fiji alone, monthly kava export earnings were around FJ\$300,000-500,000 during most of 2001, reaching up to FJ\$886,000 (April 2001) and FJ\$797,000 (October 2001) before falling to FJ\$363,000 and FJ\$153,000 in November and December 2001, respectively. For January-May 2002, kava export earnings hovered between FJ\$103,000 and FJ\$148,000 per month. Quarterly kava earnings in Fiji fell from a high of FJ\$1,313,000 in the 4th quarter of 2001 to a mere FJ\$323,000 in the 1st quarter of 2002. This represents a total fall of 75 per cent over the period. In Vanuatu, a fall from 174 MVT to a mere 42 MVT was experienced during that period. This represents a fall of 76 per cent. In Tonga, exports to UK in 2001 amounted to just 27 kg and valued at T'\$500. There have been no records for exports to EU during 2001 and first half of 2002. However, figures for exports to the USA during 2000, 2001 and first half of 2002 amounted to 5,177 kgs (T'\$102,223), 2,420 kgs (T'\$46,125), and 1,322 kgs (T'\$28,052), respectively³. Figures for Samoa are not available but it is estimated that they have also experienced significant losses to their total export earnings since late 2001.

Excerpt from "Status of the Kava Industry", a presentation by Mr. Jaindra Kumar, Director of Trade and Investment Division Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat at the Kava Symposium in Suva, Fiji, November 6-7, 2002.