



PRESS RELEASE

Date: 3/8/06 for immediate release

Pages: 2

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Survey Reveals Public Support for Protection from Invasive Species

The Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS), a public-private partnership working on invasive species issues, contracted QMark Research & Polling to conduct a telephone poll among Hawaii residents.

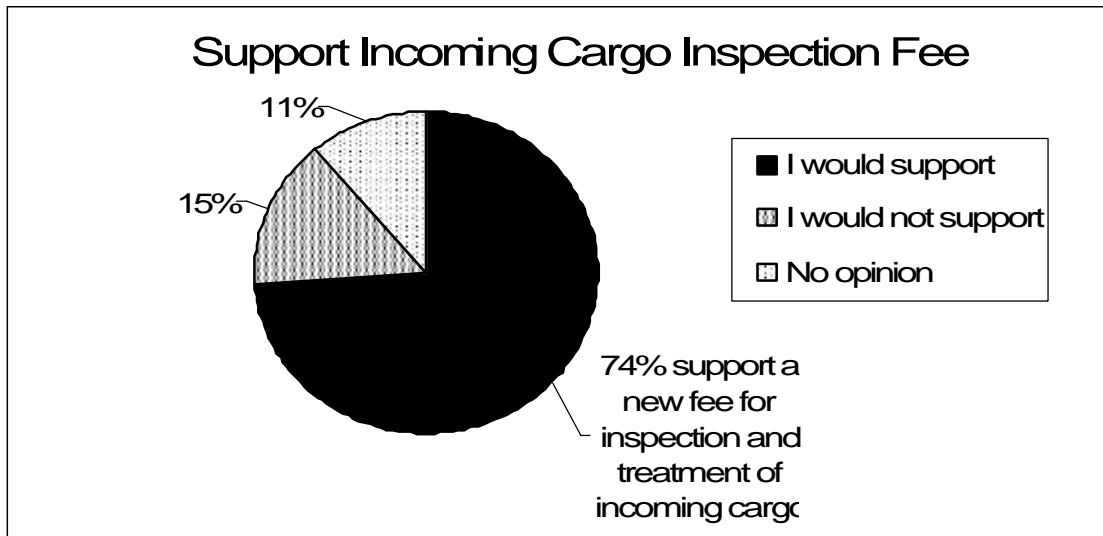
The statewide phone survey was conducted in February 2007, and one of the questions should provide some guidance for legislators when considering bills to fund programs to prevent invasive species from entering the state.

There is a tremendous amount of incoming goods that need to be searched for invasive pests, and part of that job belongs to the Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDOA). Yet HDOA lacks adequate funding to inspect domestic cargo and goods entering Hawaii for invasive species. The HDOA budget is less than 1% of the state budget, and the percentage moves up and down with the state budget—it has not risen with the amount of incoming goods that require inspection or quarantine services.

Two bills (companion bills HB 772, SB 1066) in the legislature aim to ensure a steady and appropriate source of funds for inspection and quarantine services. The bills propose that a reasonable service fee be charged to those importing cargo, to ensure that the amount of incoming cargo is commensurate with inspection and treatment costs.

There is public support for the service fee. Survey participants were asked the following question:

“Currently, the Hawaii Department of Agriculture is responsible for inspecting cargo and goods entering Hawaii for invasive or non-native species that might be harmful to our State’s native plants and animals. There is a proposal to charge a fee for inspecting services directly to those sending cargo so that funding for inspection and quarantine services can keep up with the rising amount of cargo entering Hawaii.”



Overall, three in four (74%) respondents support a law that would allow the Department of Agriculture to charge an appropriate fee for inspecting incoming cargo and for quarantine services when applicable. *Note: The margin of error for a sample of this size (n=500) is +/- 4.38 percentage-points with a 95% confidence level.*

“It is appropriate that these charges be paid by the importers, as they are using the inspection and quarantine services,” said Dean Okimoto, owner of Nalo Farms and president of Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation. “If it isn’t paid by someone, the work won’t get done and we all suffer the consequences. We can’t keep receiving new invasive species—what’s next, Red Imported Fire Ants, maybe a forest disease that kills koa trees, or more agriculture pests that continue to undermine that portion of our economy?”

Over the past several years the Hawaii Department of Agriculture has conducted a number of inspection “blitzes”, where virtually all incoming cargo is inspected to determine what types of cargo and commodities are prone to carry more invasive species. Although there have been concerns raised that increased inspection could slow down incoming goods, the information gained from these blitzes combined with an increase in number of inspectors could actually speed the process.

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Christy Martin is the Public Information Officer for the statewide Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS).