



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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I was disappointed to see that Mr. Botti, president of the Hawai'i Food Industry Association, considers the bill to charge a fee of 50 cents per 1,000 pounds of incoming cargo, "a total disaster." His argument is that frozen foods and refrigerators are heavier than leafy greens, but less likely to bring in invasive pests. This may seem reasonable, but this narrow perspective does not take into account several important reasons why a fee structure cannot be based solely on the type of commodity and the risk it poses.

First, commodities such as building materials, car parts and other items are staged for loading, allowing ample opportunity for species such as Red Imported Fire Ants or snakes a chance to climb aboard. A container of munitions could be low risk, according to Mr. Botti's argument, but a live brown treesnake was found in a sealed container at McAlester Ammunition Plant in Oklahoma. The container had been loaded on Guam three months prior.

Second, although some goods may indeed be lower risk themselves, they may be packaged on pallets, or in crates and wood packing materials, which are proven to carry invasive insects such as the Asian Longhorn Beetle. These types of cargo are difficult to target for inspection, as the manifests would never list the packing material, and only rarely list all of the commodities. Shipments could be hundreds of types of goods, but manifests include only minimal information.

These issues are compounded by the fact that most cargo is mixed higher and lower risk items and goods, consolidated and packed for shipping to maximize efficiency, but virtually impossible to separate into different fee categories.

Although the timing is less than optimal, \$5 per person, per year seems a bargain compared to the cost of the not-yet-present Red Imported Fire Ant (\$170 per person, per year), or cost of having brown treesnakes in Hawai'i (\$330 per person, per year).

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Christy Martin is the Public Information Officer for the statewide Coordinating Group on Alien Pest Species (CGAPS), a public-private partnership working to protect Hawaii from invasive species.

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