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**The Coffee Berry Borer and Coffee Research at the United States
Department of Agriculture.**

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In addition to the ever increasing attention garnered by the historically low coffee prices, there are other coffee production-related issues that deserve attention. Two which are of paramount importance and which are tightly intertwined are the agronomic problems faced by growers (e.g., pest and disease control) and the transfer of coffee-related information to growers, scientists, extensionists, and coffee organizations. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) coffee research program is working on both areas. The main focus of the program is to conduct research aimed at developing innovative pest control strategies against the coffee berry borer, the most devastating insect pest of coffee throughout the world.

As a consequence of our work in Latin America and Africa, we have frequently noticed that most of the scientific literature dealing with the coffee berry borer has not reached coffee scientists and extensionists, often times resulting in an unnecessary repetition of research and more importantly, in them not being aware of information that might be essential to tackle the coffee berry borer problem. This lack of an effective mechanism in the coffee industry for the transfer of information is astonishing, when we consider that in terms of economic value, coffee is one of the world's most important agricultural commodities, accounting for an estimated \$55 billion annually (Cárdenas 2001) and second only to oil as a source of foreign exchange for many developing countries. The International Coffee Organization (ICO) estimates that coffee production directly employs at least 25 million people full-time on a world-wide basis; when coffee-related activities are taken into account (e.g., roasting, processing, transportation, etc.) this figure increases to 100 million people (ICO 1997). Other agricultural commodities have international research centers dedicated to their study. Witness the International

Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in Mexico and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines, two of 16 research centers under the umbrella of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Dr. Gabriel Cádena, Director of the National Coffee Research Center (Cenicafé) in Colombia has proposed the establishment of an International Coffee Research Center, an organization whose creation is long overdue.

USDA will continue to conduct research aimed at developing methodologies that can be used to reduce the impact of the coffee berry borer, and will also continue its efforts aimed at increasing the transfer of information. USDA is actively working towards forming a strong partnership with the US coffee industry in order to jointly identify the most important areas in need of research for the sustainability of a crop in crisis.

References

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