Media Consortium Call 11-8-13

Focus: Kauai

**Craig Malina**, Founder, Specialty Studios

**Andrea Brower**, directed a nonprofit around local agriculture on Kauai; working on a PhD.; working with Gary Hauser on the movement to challenge the companies using pesticides and GMO crops; blogger for Huffpost;

**Lyle Robinson**, active on Kauai and with logistics; naturopathic physician

**Maureen Nandini Mitra**, Managing Editor, Earth Island Journal

**Laura Burge** and Julia, Care2

**James Trimarco**, web editor, Yes! magazine

**Mike Ludwig**, reporter, Truthout.org

**Kim Spencer**, founder and editorial director, LinkTV

**Jo Ellen Green Kaiser**, Executive Director, Media Consortium

**Introductions**

Maureen: we have consistently covered GE crops. I previously did a story on genetically modified trees. I would probably do long-form reporting on this story, for the web issue.

Mike: I do investigative reporting on politics and the enviroment. Recently, I did an investigation on pesticides in Washington, and how they use invasive species as an excuse for pesticide spraying. I’ve also used FOIA requests on Monsanto.

James: I write on agriculture and biotechnology. We cover issues from a solutions approach. We’ll say, here’s how the grassroots is trying to develop a model for sustainable agriculture. We covered the GMO labeling issue in Washington State, for example. In Kauai, we are interested in what communities are doing around resistance or an alternative.

Kim: We have a weekly half-hour program called Earth Focus, which has an audience of 5 million on TV. We do a number of stories each year on GMO.

Laura and Julia: We create petitions on issues, and also manage freelance bloggers. They are passionate about GMOs.

Jo Ellen: Media Consortium is an international network of over 65 independent progressive news outlets. Our mission is to support and grow the impact of our members. We have spent many years building editorial collaborations to

Craig: I got called to Kauai and mobilized by what is going on.

Andrea: Really excited you are here. We’ve been getting national and international attention, but stories being told are not really based on what’s actually happening, or the social justice issues here.

Lyle: Excited to have you all coming. I was horrified by the GMO seed here, and how little people were originally talking about it. I’m thrilled by the local uprising to take back our food and our land.

**Overview of Issue: Andrea**

Over past year, there were increasing concerns around pesticide esp health care. A bill was introduced in June which has mobilized people, especially young people. 4000 people took to the street in favor of the bill, the largest demonstration ever. This has been a divisive issue, however. The day the bill was introduced, a company told its workers that they would close down and workers would lose their jobs if it passed.

The bill passed 6-1, it was vetoed by the mayor, and yesterday the council scheduled November 14 to override the veto. One of the council members who voted for it is no longer on the council; one of the current council members may switch their vote, and it needs 5 votes to overrride.

The west side is the most impacted community. If the veto is not overriden, there will be continuing protests. Meanwhile, the state is moving to take away county’s rights to regulate agriculture, so even if the bill passes, it may be overriden by state rules in the future.

**Reporters Comments/Concerns:**

Mike: I’d like to make it there by the vote; that will help me find personal stories. I’m also getting the idea that we just don’t know which pesticides are being used. Is that true?

Andrea: We have the sales records, so we know which pesticides they are buying and in what amounts, but we don’t know if there are other sources for the pesticides, how they are using them, how they are combining them, etc. If you email me, we can send you the records—we got them from the Dept. of Ag. There’s also a provision in the rule that if they don’t abide by the disclosure provisions, there are criminal penalties.

Maureen: Who put together the bill?

Andrea: Gary Hoosier, who is a councilperson, was approached by concerned young people, and he began formulating it. Center for Food Safety, EarthJustice, Pesticide Action Network contributed legal advice and helped craft it. If the bill passes, the chemical companies said they will sue us, but we have pro bono help lined up if that happens.

James: Is there a sustainable agriculture movement on the island?

Andrea: Yes. There is an interesting dynamic there. We have an increasing number of organic farms and a movement for supporting local food, and even more, food that is grounded in indigenous knowledge. But chemical companies’ use of land is undermining this movement. The stories are connected.

Maureen: We need phone numbers and emails.

Maureen: I can’t come in for the vote next week, because I have a conference I have to present at next week.

James: I can’t make the vote next week, but I can come in after that.

Laura: I would like to get a petition up before the vote, encouraging lawmakers to do the right thing. It depends on how much time Craig and Andrea have to discuss. We have 23 million members. WE have 3 million page views per month on the blog site, and more on the petition site.

Maureen: We can write up something before the vote, and link to the Care2 petition.

Andrea: The petition sometimes works against us, because there is a sense that it is driven by outsiders. The remaining council member needs to be convinced by folks in his district. It might be better to leverage the petition after the vote. I also want to warn you that the community is very distrustful about outsiders coming in and doing an Erin Brockovich story.

Maureen: It would be good to understand what would harm the cause before we go in.

Andrea: There is a community that thinks they are impacted but we don’t have the data. PBS tried to tell it, Frontline is trying to tell it, but people in that community feel like they’ve been used, because once the cameras are gone, they are being ostracized by their neighbors.

We need to bring more of the mainstream of Hawaii into this movement, and talk about more systematic issues. So, talking about what is going on in the West Side in terms of chemical companies using state land. Doing investigations about which pesticides are being used. Following the money around the corporations influence in politics. Telling a story about the movement that can inspire others.