

New DNA Lab to help safe guard PNG's Coffee Industry

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With the completion of a new DNA lab, the coffee industry in Papua New Guinea is a step ahead in its efforts to prevent and safeguard the coffee industry from the biggest pest in the world – the coffee berry borer.

Many coffee producing countries in the world have been affected by this pest costing about \$500 million US in damages each year.

Also known as Broca, the female beetles have wings though they can

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The beetles make their way into the coffee berries after about eight weeks of flowering through the top pointy part of the coffee berries attacking both the immature and mature coffee cherries.

For a very small insect being just about 1.5 millimetres in size, even tinier than a rice grain, the coffee berry borer is the biggest devastating pest to coffee around the world. Detection is also difficult because there are many other insects that look similar to it which may be a contributing factor as to how the tiny caffeine-loving beetle has spread from its original homeland in Africa to many other parts of the world.

The Coffee Industry Corporation (CIC) of PNG is committed to keeping PNG free of the coffee berry borer.

As the coffee industry grows more profitable in PNG, it becomes more likely that the coffee berry borer will show up someday.

CIC wants to make sure that the beetle can be identified so that it can be eliminated before it spreads.

As part of this commitment, the organisation has just completed a high-tech laboratory for identifying the coffee berry borer using DNA methods.

“The lab is a great pride for PNG, the completion of this lab means that PNG is becoming a world leader in the coffee industry, and that

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we are in control of our future," stated the Acting Chief Scientist and Team Leader in Integrated Farming Systems and Principal Entomologist officer at CIC, Dr. Nelson Simbiken.

This lab will be dedicated to rapid identification of the coffee berry borer and will also be used to carry out other diverse projects; including enhancing techniques used in:

- coffee breeding,
- increase coffee productivity in PNG, and
- identify any plant pest other than those that affect coffee



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Joanita Nonwo

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