

Coffee industry opens new lab

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A weeklong training on coffee berry borer identification procedures was completed last week following the opening of a high technology laboratory which was utilised for the program. The new facility established at the Coffee Industry Corporation (CIC) research station in Aiyura is fully equipped with the latest technology with assistance by partners from the University of Florida in USA and funding support from the national government. The training was attended by research staff at Coffee Industry Corporation and participants from the Binatang Research Institute in Madang. Graduate research assistant at Florida University, Craig Bateman, explained that CBB is a tiny little beetle that infests coffee berries all around the world but it is not yet in PNG therefore the need to keep it out. Mr Bateman added that the problem is that CBB looks like other tiny beetles that make it difficult to identify with naked human eyes. "The DNA lab is needed to look at extremely informative sections of the insect to help us identify CBB. "It is much more efficient than simply using morphology," he said. Participants were taken through the procedures of DNA analysis and how to take high resolution photos of bark beetles sent in by farmers or extension officers in the field. Fellow researcher at Florida University Andrew Johnson emphasised that the training was an introductory one and they would need another two weeks to fully cover all the procedures in the DNA lab. He added that the critical process in the identification process would be the analysis part as it would need the longest time possible in making sure enough background information is collected on a particular beetle to avoid incorrect results as CBB. Coffee Industry Corporation chief executive officer Charles Dambui said that the training was timely for the operations of the new lab and important for officers involved. "We are proud that the facility can now cater for rapid identification of any CBB suspects and providing safeguard for the industry from this deadly beetle." The new lab comes with equipment such as microscopes for general pest identification, a dedicated camera scope high resolution images of tiny beetles of less than 2mm long, freezers for storage of chemicals, and an autoclave for sterilizing lab items among others. Meantime, a follow on training is being arranged by Coffee Industry Corporation and partners from the University of Florida in the coming months.