

Friday, March 27, 2009

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Saturday, January 17, 2009

Organic food tied to Puna Rat Lungworm outbreak -- more cases reported

By Andrew Walden :: 759 Views



by Andrew Walden

Another case of Rat Lungworm disease has been diagnosed in the Kapoho-Kalapana area of Puna and more unreported cases have been revealed. The outbreak has been tied to organic farming.

According to the [Honolulu Star Bulletin](#) January 17:

Graham McCumber, 24, of Kapoho has been in intensive care at the Queen's Medical Center for the past few days, according to a family member and friend.

McCumber, a construction worker who also worked on an organic farm, is among three Big Island people recently afflicted with the disease. One of them, 38-year-old Silka Strauch of Black Sands, was admitted to Hilo Medical Center on Dec. 8 and has been in a coma for weeks.

Like Halda and Strauch, McCumber grew his own vegetables.

"To have a 24-year-old kid dying from eating a salad is beyond my comprehension," said McCumber's friend Dennis Letvin.

McCumber's uncle Geoff Rauch said Graham, who was noticeably sick by Dec. 18, has sustained a lot of brain damage. "It doesn't look good," Rauch said.

Rauch said he has known other people who have contracted the disease, but none as severe.

Both cases emerged after a [November 20-23, 2008 Raw Food Festival](#) in Kalapana.

Rauch was an anti-GMO activist instrumental in pushing for the Hawai`i County Council's ban on GM coffee and taro passed last November. Rauch and anti-GM activist Nancy Redfeather are listed as Big Island contacts for the "[Know Your Farmer Alliance](#)." Their website [alerted viewers](#) to testify in favor of the Council's November 13, 2008 vote to override then-Mayor Harry Kim's veto of the anti-GMO ordinance.

But now the [Star-Bulletin](#) reports a different priority:

Letvin, an organic farmer, said with economic hard times, people turning to backyard gardening should be aware of the dangers of growing leafy vegetables without taking precautions.

"My concern is we might be hammering nails on our children's coffins," he said.

Letvin said he has pulled out all of his leafy vegetables and thrown them away because there was nothing in the world worth the suffering from the disease.

Rauch tells the [Star-Bulletin](#): "I think everyone is take aback by this."

The "Know Your Farmer Alliance" now features a [fast-growing webpage](#) warning of the dangers of Rat Lungworm disease which points out:

"Recently (November/December 2008) 3 young people have ended up in Hilo Hospital in serious condition. Other cases over the years have also resulted in hospitalization and many

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others cases have been reported within the community over the past years."

The *Star-Bulletin* explains:

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, most victims recover from the disease. But the critical condition of McCumber and Strauch points out the potential for extreme consequences.

The disease occurs when parasitic worms are passed from rat feces to slugs or snails and then to people.

The worms usually die after several weeks but can cause significant pain and damage to the nervous system and, in some instances, paralysis, blindness and death, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.


Unlike the risks inherent in organic food production and raw food consumption, the genetic modification of foods has never been shown to have harmed a single human being anywhere on earth, ever.

Related: [Scientific American "Watch out Hawaii" Jan 8, 2009](#)

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