

**Cacao season kicking in!**

Our processing facility is finally swamped by dripping, strong-smelling juice from 3,000 lbs of newly acquired cacao this weekend. The team is happy to see all of our tiered fermentation boxes full for the first time this season! A new unit of nine cascading fermentation boxes is currently under construction in preparation for our biggest crop yet. The new boxes are bigger and include removable slides to allow for microfermentation of unique varieties (see below for more on how we're starting to catalogue and identify different types of cacao growing in Belize!). We'll be sure to send updates with pictures of the new fermentation boxes once they have been built.



**Kiva lending under way**

*In December MMC successfully raised funds for nine farmers in less than 24 hours through the Kiva microlending platform! Keep an eye out for new farmer profiles going up this month.*

Total money raised so far is \$4,125 out of the available \$20K credit line through the experimental partnership with Kiva. The average loan requested by farmer is \$433, and farmers are mostly interested in loans for cleaning their farms. Cleaning means cutting the underbrush that surrounds cacao trees to clear access for pruning, harvesting and prevent proliferation of fungal diseases that spread through the pores in cacao pods. Cacao farms are literally in the middle of the jungle, as they require shade and nutrients from timber trees to keep producing cacao for many decades, making cleaning necessary every three to four months.

**MMC is making the rounds!**

2013 will be a big year for Maya Mountain Cacao as we scale up our operations within Belize. We are looking to raise up to \$500K over coming months to cover working capital, supplier capacity-building, tree planting, and capital expenditures to help us and our farmer network grow in 2013. MMC will be networking and/or pitching at these upcoming events -- please let us know if you'll be there too!

- Fine Chocolate Industry Association (FCIA) Winter Event (USA)
- Fancy Food Show (USA)
- Agora Accelerator Retreat (Nicaragua)
- Foro Latinoamericano de Inversion de Impacto (Mexico)

**Focused work on varieties**

*A critical part of Maya Mountain Cacao's value proposition to chocolate makers is a deep understanding of and commitment to cacao quality. Beyond our closely monitored and evaluated fermentation and drying practices, we have begun digging deeper into an understanding of the various types of cacao grown on our farms and in various nooks and crannies of the Belizean jungle.*

While scientists have classified up to 10 unique varietal "clusters" of cacao, there are three primary genetic groups used to describe types of Theobroma cacao, the "chocolate tree." These are: forastero, criollo, and trinitario (a highly varied mixture of forastero and criollo). Forastero cacao is characterized by dark, bitter purple seeds that retain a deep chocolate flavor in processing. The vast majority (over 70%)

of cacao grown globally is Forastero.

Criollo cacao, which is found almost exclusively in Central America, developed unique genetic characteristics including a pure white seed free of any bitter tastes. Less than 2% of cacao grown in the world is genetically criollo, and even less than that is pure, white seed criollo.



**Heirloom criollo cacao growing wild among unexcavated Mayan ruins deep in the Belizean jungle**

We already know that the cacao tree population in Belize consists primarily of a wide variety of trinitarios and a small amount of criollos. What we don't know is anything

about the flavor quality of the various trinitario families, or the total population of criollo trees in Belize and how those trees can improve farms' overall quality.

This December, MMC hosted traveling Central American cacao expert Steve Bergin, who has spent the last several years helping cacao producers across Central America better identify and experiment with the different genetic types of cacao growing on their farms. Steve's visit provided an excellent opportunity for our Field and Quality teams to learn more about the different cacao "families" growing in Belize and Guatemala, as well as the flavor profiles of each.

We experimented with cataloging various trinitario families based on pod morphology from multiple farms and then microfermented and tasted the different batches. MMC's Managing Director Emily Stone and Steve also visited several special corners of southern Belize where ancient heirloom criollo cacao grows

wild in deeply forested groves, identifying multiple morphological types of pure, 100% white Criollo cacao pods growing in this region. MMC is currently developing a project that will help smallholder farmers propagate these trees, which produce extremely rare and valuable cacao beans, at commercial scale.

**Meet the Team: Orlando Coc**

*Village: Laguna*

*Position: Administrative Associate*

Orlando joined MMC in mid December. A recent graduate of accounting with a dual bachelor degree from Galen University and the University of Indianapolis, Orlando will be in charge of the books and step up as MMC's Kiva coordinator, overseeing loans extended to farmers through this exciting new partnership. He will be instrumental in promoting financial literacy among the borrowers and our larger farmer network. "I'm most excited about the Kiva program, tracking the loans, meeting the farmers and seeing more cacao coming in. Also, I'm looking forward to improving the accounting system, bringing down costs for the company, encouraging more farmers to sell cacao to us and encourage them to increase cacao acreage," says Orlando.

