

## Heirloom Cacao Preservation (HCP) Fund

The Heirloom Cacao Preservation fund (HCP) was founded in 2012 in partnership with the Fine Chocolate Industry Association and the USDA in response to the global pressures of industrialization, environmental change, deforestation, and cacao breeding programs that focus solely on productivity threatening the world's supply of the highest quality and most flavorful cacao. Our mission to ***“discover, identify and preserve fine flavor Heirloom cacao varieties for the conservation of biological diversity and the empowerment of farming communities,”*** is now more important than ever as the world grapples with a rapidly changing climate. The preservation of the world's finest chocolate trees contributes towards the mitigation of biodiversity loss throughout the tropics, and supports economic, social, and environmental benefits. Recognizing these endangered cacao trees are the foundation for not only the most delicious chocolate, but also the livelihood of many farmers and farming communities. The HCP is the first initiative to identify and map the world's finest cacao and designate growers of these endangered, heirloom varieties. The HCP has seventeen Heirloom designees around the world, representing over 3,080 small cacao farmers. Over the past three years, the HCP has supported six of their seventeen designees on projects to develop nurseries and experimental plots to facilitate the preservation of their unique heirloom cacao.

### *Why is heirloom cacao important?*

Heirloom and indigenous species of cacao have a number ecological, economic and social benefits:

*Loss of biodiversity:* Cacao trees are shade trees that provide habitat for plants and animals normally dependent upon tropical forest

- overall biological diversity and the diversity of forest dwelling organisms is higher in cacao plantations than non-shade crops or pastoral systems;
- Indigenous cacao trees are often used in agroforestry initiatives. Heirloom varieties most often grow in the shade and grow harmoniously with other fruit trees, such as bananas, papayas, or cashews. This type of agriculture increases farmers' ability to protect against blight and increase sources of revenue.
- As a crop primarily grown in the shade, it provides habitats for numerous species including birds and other fruit bearing trees, protecting an area's unique biodiversity. Shade-grown cacao production is now seen by many as the best alternative for preserving some of the intact biodiversity in areas plagued by deforestation.

### *Importance to the small farmers:*

- Smallholder farmers with around two to four hectares of land are responsible for roughly eighty to ninety percent of total global cocoa production<sup>1</sup> and most of this production occurs in areas of high biodiversity
- Heirloom beans have terrific overall balance — complex and intense, long and pleasant — and unique flavor. It is this unique flavor profile that can be used to attract higher market prices for these rare beans, allowing more revenue to be brought in by farmers cultivating them.
- Smallholder farmers will have increased leverage, organoleptic and genetic information provided by reputable sources to strengthen negotiating power and increase their revenue.

<sup>1</sup> [https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/suc2015d4\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/suc2015d4_en.pdf)