CIRANDA

STORIES OF IMPACT

25 YEARS OF ORGANIC

STATEMENT OF

Gratitude

To the farmers who breathe life into the soil, and our supply partners who transform every seed, fruit, root and grain into the highest quality food ingredients, we are forever grateful. Thank you for your passion and dedication, and for entrusting us with your livelihood.

With the support of our friends worldwide, we embarked on a year-long journey to curate this collection of stories in honor of our twenty-fifth year in business. It is our hope that by sharing these stories we gain a greater understanding of each other and remember that we are all connected by one planet and one big sky.

Obrigado,

Hans and Joan Friese

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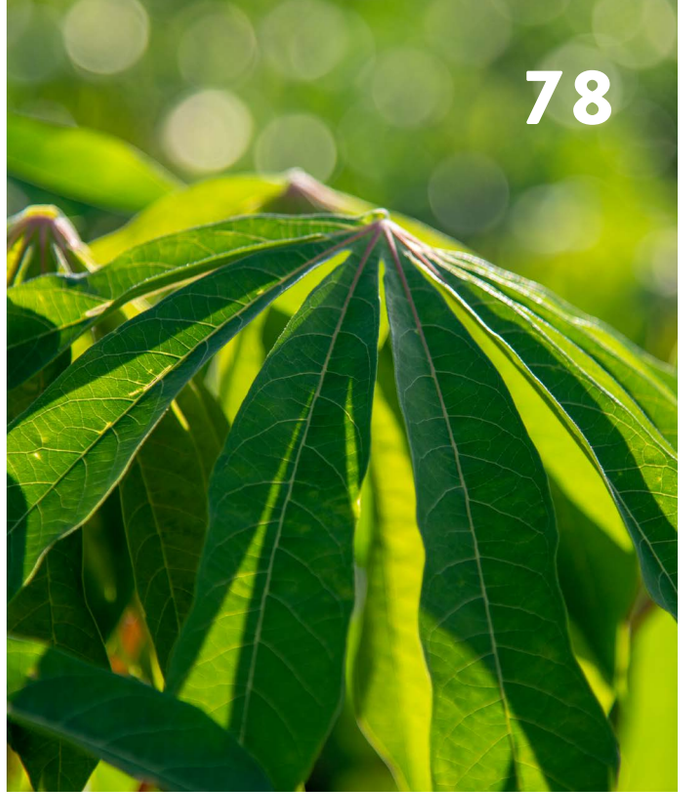


A PIONEERING SPIRIT

Founder Story

Only 25 years ago, organic foods in the United States were largely unavailable. The few products offered were relegated to “health food” stores or specialty cooperatives. Federally mandated organic production standards did not exist. Many consumers, now disconnected from the land, had forgotten the important role of food in a sustainable ecosystem, and the effort required to produce it.

Ciranda’s founders, Hans and Joan Friese, envisioned a world with clean, nourishing food for all – food grown without chemical pesticides and fertilizers, food that safeguarded human and environmental health, and food that valued the contributions of small farmers. They founded Ciranda in 1994 to support that vision.

In the company’s early days, the couple traveled primarily across the Dakotas, Michigan, Texas, and Arkansas to meet with organic farmers and share family dinners in their homes. They came away with increased knowledge, renewed respect for farming challenges, and lifelong friends and partners. Ciranda purchased organic grains, seeds and beans and began exporting to Europe – an area with a strong and established market for organic food.

Growing the company’s European customer base required regular travel with concentration in the Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France, and Belgium. After a few years, Ciranda expanded its travels into South America and Asia in search of new organic products to offer its clients. While there, they met small-scale growers, some of whom had never traveled beyond their villages or seen anyone from a foreign country, growers who sustained themselves on rocky soil with rudimentary tools and their own hard labor. They shared a cup of tea and built trust through conversation, thus, bringing new relationships and new product offerings into the mix.

A REINVENTION

By the end of the decade, European importers were seeking alternative suppliers in developing countries to offset the more expensive U.S. origin products. Increased competition, combined with an approaching federal organic program and a growing U.S. market for natural foods, prompted Ciranda to rethink its position. In 2000, the company shifted direction and reinvented itself as an importer, rather than an exporter, of organic ingredients. They drew on a broad network of international partnerships to update the portfolio with tropical oils, cocoa, and tapioca (cassava), among others.

As with all organic pioneers who were involved in the developing U.S. organic market at that time, Ciranda navigated through a web of complex certifications and made contributions to the development of the USDA National Organic Program. This program, established in 2001, is now an internationally recognized regulatory program designed to ensure organic product equivalence and efficient international trade.

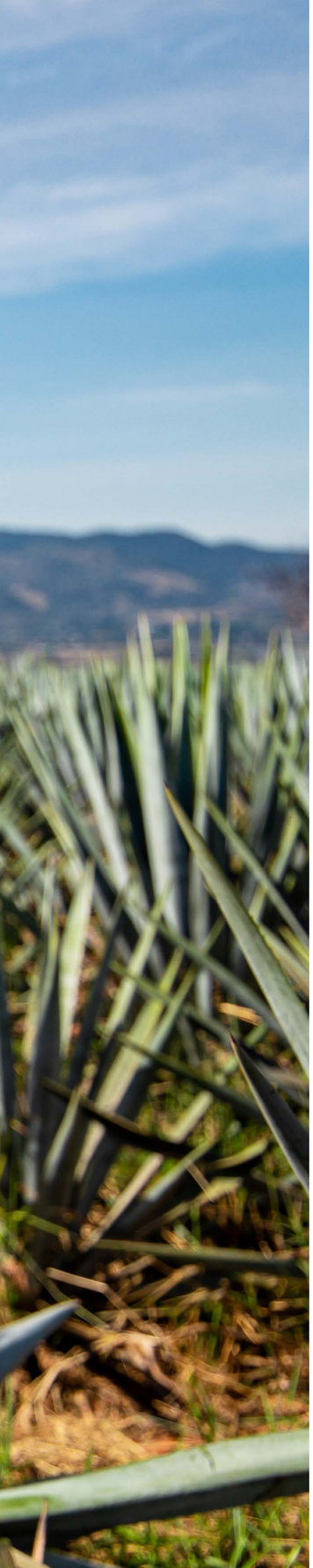
HOPE FOR TOMORROW

Twenty-five years after its founding, Ciranda remains committed to creating a sustainable food supply – one that is in harmony with nature and respects the well-being of its people. Many of the regions where Ciranda first visited are showing progress – through better tools, running water, access to schools and health care, and increased hope for the future. This progress is a direct result of fair and stable pricing for crops.

Today the company imports more than 50 million pounds of organic, non-GMO and fair trade ingredients annually from producers around the world, supplying to manufacturers in the food, beverage, supplement and personal care markets. Along the way, Ciranda expanded its presence in South and Central America, and developed additional relationships with suppliers in Asia, Africa, and Europe.

In the pages that follow we are honored to share a collection of stories highlighting just a few of the people who have been positively impacted by our daily operations. These people are the heart of our business and our success. It is our hope that you consider them as you sit down to your next meal.

HANS AND JOAN FRIESE
ENVISIONED A WORLD WITH CLEAN,
NOURISHING FOOD FOR ALL



AGAVE

Audon Conchas Hernandez

Audon Conchas Hernandez, of Buckingham, Santa Maria del Oro, has been working the land for more than half a century. The 58-year-old farmer has planted and harvested corn, beans, peanuts, and grains of all types. But for the past 20 years, he has mastered the cultivation of agave.

Audon manages a 723-hectare organic agave plantation and the 30 or more workers who plant and harvest the crop. The agave farm is located in Mexico's west-central state of Nayarit, a small state bound on the west by the Pacific Ocean and by the Sierra Madre mountains to the east. The region's hot and humid climate is ideal for growing agave, but presents numerous challenges for organic farmers. "It's more humid than other regions," says Audon, "and the weeds are green most of the time. That can make the work really difficult."

AUDON CONCHAS HERNANDEZ

Unlike most other crops, agave requires seven years of growth before it is ready for harvest. During that time, Audon and his crew diligently work the land with both traditional and modern tools to help the crop thrive and maintain a consistent growth cycle.

Workers who once removed field stones by hand now use machinery to prepare a new parcel for planting. They clean the parcel by hand with casangas or barretons, then apply organic matter with tractors or backpack pumps. After organic matter is compacted into the soil, it is ready for planting.

Hijuelos, small offshoots removed from harvested plants, are replanted in the prepared field, fertilized with organic matter to spur root production, and growth begins again. Over the seven-year growth cycle, Audon and his workers constantly monitor the fields for pests and disease and clean the fields by hand, using chopped weeds as organic matter to enrich the fields.

Agave harvesting is also a labor-intensive process. After removing the hijuelos for future planting, workers strip the leaves from the dense eight-foot plant and leave them in the fields to enrich the soil. The final product, the agave core, known as a piña, is loaded onto trucks for distribution and processing into syrup or inulin. “With the organic field everything is better,” he says. “We pollute less, and give less trouble to the environment. And most important is we have clean agave and we have more.” When harvested, each hectare yields an average of 80 tons.

After decades of hard work, Audon's love of farming is as strong as ever. He looks forward to cultivating his own land while managing the plantation. “We are very comfortable working,” he states. “We work really hard, with a lot of enthusiasm and a lot of love.”

At the end of the day, Audon heads home to his ranch, where he and his wife raised two daughters and a son, and supported their education. At home, he does chores, helps his wife in the family’s store, and visits with one of his kids. On weekends, his children and grandchildren gather at the “big house” to talk, eat a good meal, and spend time together. “They do all right for themselves,” he says of his children, “and any day is good to get together.”

“WITH THE ORGANIC FIELD
EVERYTHING IS BETTER.”

— AUDON

TAPIOCA | CASSAVA

Eloir Skrzypczak

Eloir Skrzypczak, of Capanema, Brazil has farmed all his life, from dairy and beef production to corn, grass, and sugar cane. For the past two years, he has cultivated organic cassava on 4.5 hectares of his 11-hectare farm in Brazil's Paraná state.

The starchy cassava root, a versatile vegetable used to make flour and tapioca, is a diet staple in Brazil and tropical cultures throughout the world. And although it is easier to manage than many crops, the woody, drought-resistant shrub still requires great care to maximize yield. Most of it is done by hand.

Eloir uses a tractor to prepare the fields for planting. Then, sometimes with the help of his wife and nine-year-old son, he carefully plants each propagated cutting by hand, spacing each as tightly as possible. If plants are spaced too far apart, they will be susceptible to breakage from high winds. Planting too close together hampers root growth, which is the essence of the plant.

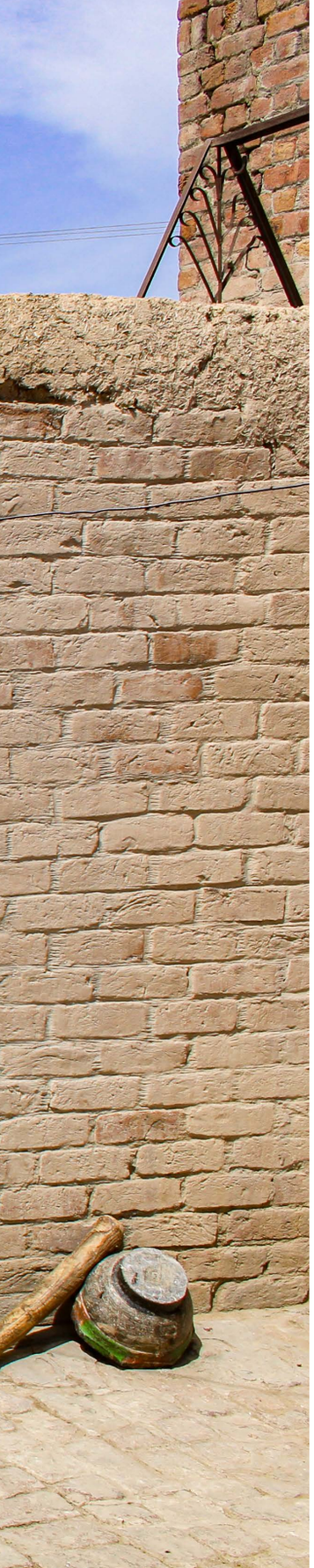
ELOIR SKRZYPCZAK

Weed management is also essential to maximizing yield in the cassava fields, and it requires both machine and manual labor. Because the plant grows so quickly, weeding can be done by machine only during the first month, when the plant is up to a foot tall. After that, Eloir hires 10 people to weed the fields by hand on 40 days throughout the nine-month growing season, which totals about 50 percent of total expenses.

Even with careful planting, weather often takes a toll on the cassava fields. Five bad storms over the past season left Eloir's fields with many broken tops. With damage factored in, he still expects to yield about 120 metric tons of cassava root his second season, about 30 percent more than he did his first year. Next season, he plans to dedicate 2.5 additional hectares to cassava.

Cassava harvesting is also done by hand. Each plant is pulled from the ground and stripped of leaves, which are used for animal feed. Stems are cut into sections for replanting, and the cassava roots are loaded onto a rented truck for transport to the processing. During harvest, Eloir delivers about 10 tons of cassava a day to the factory.

When he is not working, Eloir can be found fishing, playing cards with friends, or relaxing at home with his wife and son. His 18-year-old daughter, now at college, visits when she can. When gathering together for a weekend meal, Eloir is often preparing family favorites on the barbeque grill — including cassava.



RICE

Asma Shabbir

The Sheikhupura District in Pakistan's Punjab province boasts a rich clay soil that is ideal for farming. Since childhood, 45-year-old Asma Shabbir has worked this land, producing wheat, corn, and the aromatic, long-grained basmati rice for which the region is famous.

Today, Asma leases and operates a 5-hectare farm in Mureedke, northwest of Lahore, growing crops that have sustained the area for generations. Situated on a level, alluvial plain, Asma waters her crops from a canal and a tube well. "Rice and wheat are famous," she says. "But along with these, we also cultivate animal feeds and vegetables. Every crop has its own season."

In July and August, Asma plants rice, a labor-intensive process. Seeds are gathered, then soaked in water to aid germination. "Then we furrow the land, and finally, we transfer the seeds to the land," she says. The November harvest is sometimes done by hand, as well, but usually by machine. Once complete, she plants wheat the same way, then harvests it April and May. Asma also cultivates corn during the wheat season, which is used for animal feed.

ASMA SHABBIR

Whatever the season, days are full for the mother of four and her husband, a government employee. “We wake up early in the morning and we offer prayers,” she says. “After breakfast, the children go to school and I go to the fields.”

Asma interacts closely with other farmers throughout the day to solve problems and manage the crops. In recent years, she and the others have received on-site training from agricultural experts, enabling them to work more effectively. “They not only taught us new methods for cultivation, but also visited our fields with professionals and helped us improve,” she says.

With expert help, Asma has learned to use water more effectively, thus avoiding excess watering and limiting the use of expensive diesel fuel used to pump it from the tube well. As a result, her expenses are lower and rice yields have risen from 3 tons to more than 4 tons per hectare, boosting her income.

As the mother of two sons and two daughters, Asma hopes to someday see new opportunities for women, who sit idle at home during the off-season. “Our income is linked with rice and wheat cultivations,” she says. “There should be an alternative way to earn instead of farming.”

In the evening, Asma and her family gather together on the patio to discuss the day and enjoy a meal of biryani and kheer, two regional rice specialties. And while she also enjoys tending her many animals -- a dog, birds, goats and buffalos – she most enjoys visiting with family and friends of all ages.

“MY HOBBY IS TO SIT WITH ELDERS AND TAKE THEIR ADVICE.” – ASMA

COCOA

Dely Neyra

For more than a decade, 50-year-old Dely Neyra has dedicated herself to producing organic cocoa on her farm in Peru's San José de Sisa province, about 58 kilometers from the city of Tarapoto.

Dely and her husband, Mr. Ildeman, purchased the large, 5-hectare farm in 2006. Since then, the mother of three has drawn on her technical studies in agriculture to grow fruits and other crops. Her main crop is cacao, which grows well in the region's temperate climate.

Dely's day begins at 4 a.m., when she prepares breakfast for her husband and daughters, before heading to work at the cocoa plantation, about 20 minutes away. She returns home for lunch with her husband at 1 p.m., after he finishes teaching morning classes, then the two of them return to the farm together to supervise and work with their crops.


SANTA CRUZ
EL DORADO

DELY NEYRA

Dely noted that, over the past several years, climate change has affected the areas's growing season. While harvesting used to begin in February, high season for cocoa harvesting is now considered to be June through October.

Harvesting cocoa is a labor-intensive process, done by hand when days are clear and dry, since rain can damage the harvested crop. Dely and her workers use scissors to remove low-lying cobs from the trees, and sickles to remove cobs in the trees' higher reaches. Once cobs are removed, workers use machetes to open the cobs and remove the seeds/beans. The cacoa seeds/beans are then packed in jute bags and transported by mototaxi to the warehouse, then sent to the cocoa facility in Pisco for processing. The harvested leaves and cocoa shells are left on the ground to enrich the soil. Also, honey obtained from the cocoa slime during the fermentation process is skimmed and used for beverages.

Growth and improvement are always on Dely's mind. To that end, she and other cocoa producers in the Santa Cruz district work together as an association to sell and promote their product. In 2017 she partnered with the area's largest organic distributor which has helped her improve her farming methods. With company-provided tools, technical assistance, and training on cocoa cultivation, Dely's cocoa yield per hectare is now 700 kilograms.

In addition to improving yields, selling cocoa with organic certification also allows Dely to differentiate from other farmers and sell for a higher price, leading to better profits.

Dely and her husband return home in the evening to relax and have dinner with their daughters. While the family usually devotes free time to working on their land, they take time on Sundays to have lunch together, often enjoying their favorite ceviche and chicken soup. On some weekends, they go out for lunch together at local restaurants.

She has high hopes for her daughters' future. Their eldest daughter has completed her studies at the university and works outside the farm. The second daughter is attending college, and the youngest is still in school. Dely's goal is to ensure that they each complete their higher education and avoid marrying and starting families too young, which is common in the region.

For Dely, her future is tied to organic cocoa. She plans to buy more land to cultivate, maintain necessary certifications, and produce a product of the highest quality.

DELY NEYRA

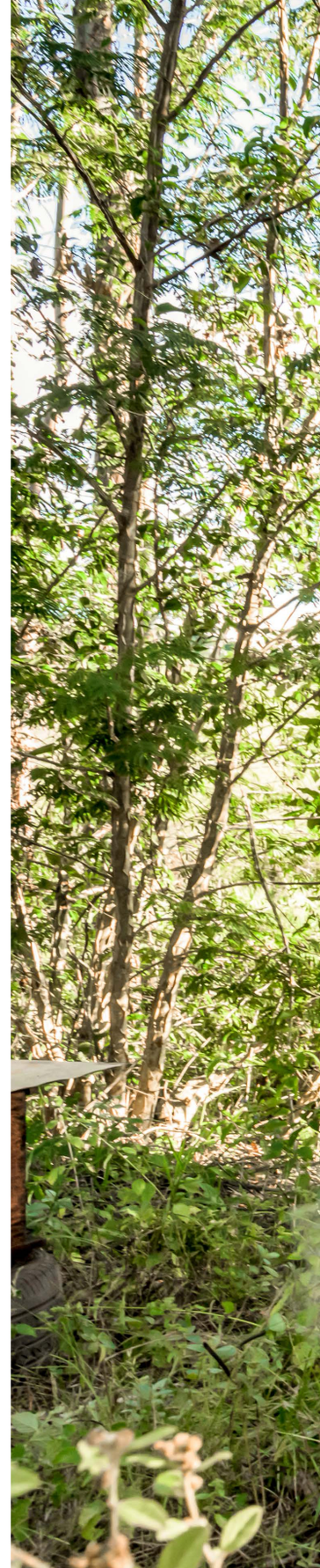
HONEY

Collor José de Almeida Guerra

Growing up on a family farm in Guanhães, in southeastern Brazil's state of Minas Gerais, Collor José de Almeida Guerra learned to raise crops and cattle, and produce milk and cheese, before moving to the city as an electrician. But at age 21, he found his calling and returned to his home after a friend told him about beekeeping.

Now, at age 29, Collor has never stopped studying the behavior of this fascinating insect. Today, he has about 50 apiaries, with a total of 900 beehives near his home in Guanhães, which produce about 20 tons of honey per year or more.

Honey is harvested twice a year, in relation to the natural flowering of the region's plants. The season's first flowering of the eucalyptus plant, which spans the months between February and April, yielded 19 tons of honey this year. The spring's wild-flowering period, between August and October, will yield a second harvest, which is expected to bring in 12 tons more. Each harvest takes two to three weeks to complete with the help of nearby resident, Kleyton Conceição Francisco de Araujo. Collor ships his honey to his corporate partner for export worldwide.

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COLLOR JOSÉ DE ALMEIDA GUERRA

When he is not harvesting honey, Collor maintains his equipment and facilities, and manages his apiaries, which are scattered within the eucalyptus crops of a large pulp company and in belts of native forests near other eucalyptus fields, an area that spans 12,000 hectares of eucalyptus and native forest. In these areas, there is no deforestation or pesticide use, which guarantees the quality of the honey that he produces.

Collor's expanding production has allowed him to improve his business operations. In recent years, he has built a warehouse, a shed that houses his honey house, and a workshop where he maintains his equipment. A new pickup truck, now on order, will increase his productivity in added comfort. With profits from his business he has also bought land and built a house where he lives with his wife, Júnia Aparecida, and his two children, four-year-old Guilherme, and 18-month-old Mariana.

Looking ahead, Collor hopes to ensure a good education for his children so that they can choose their own path in life, whether in beekeeping in the countryside, or in something else. But for Collor, satisfaction with beekeeping allows him to wake up early every day ready to work, even on Sundays or holidays, and he can't see himself doing anything else.

"I HAVE A LOT OF QUALITY OF LIFE, I WOULD NOT TRADE IT FOR ANYTHING." – COLLOR

PALM

Guido Pinto

Farmer Guido Pinto and his wife, Carmen León of La Concordia, Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas, Ecuador, respect the natural world – both the land and the wildlife that populate their region. "We love animals dearly," he says, "and we live here as guests of this wonderful nature that surrounds us."

The couple have devoted themselves to caring for animals, and their mission is known to others throughout the area. People who find injured horses, dogs, birds, and other animals along the road often bring them to the Pintos for care, and "we restore them to good health," he says proudly. To nurture the animals and keep them close, the Pintos surrounded their house with a protective cage, a barrier that keeps the animals near but prevents them from entering their home. "But it is us who are 'jailed' and the animals roam freely on our property," he says.

In recent years, Guido has also dedicated himself to nurturing the land by shifting to organic farming methods for his palm fruit crop, which is processed into palm oil and other products. "We have not used any chemical fertilizer or used any strong artificial products for close to a decade," he says.

Today, the Pintos' working relationship with a local organic processor has made life better in many ways. First, the Pintos enjoy higher, stable prices for their fruit of palm. "Now we know how much our income will be and we can plan accordingly," says Guido. "In any case, we know that we are caring for mother earth that is so generous to us. We know that all our production is clean, healthy, and friendly-with-the-environment," he adds, "and we are proud to know that our products may be used by conscious consumers in faraway places all over the planet."

The shift to organic cultivation has also brought more wild animals back to the area. Guido often finds armadillos, many species of birds, and even small ocelots while working in the fields.

“IN ANY CASE, WE KNOW THAT WE ARE CARING FOR MOTHER EARTH THAT IS SO GENEROUS TO US.”

— GUIDO


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COCONUT

Amelia Belo

Days start early each day for Amelia Belo, a 41-year-old coconut farmer from Barangay Tabason, Tagkawayan, Quezon, Phillippines. The mother of five rises at 4 a.m. to clean the house and prepare breakfast for her family. For the past 10 years, she has worked on her family's coconut farm, run a small junkshop business, and provided manicures, pedicures, and massages on the side for additional income.

Since Amelia joined the Organic/ Fair Trade program in 2013, coconut farming has become the family's main source of income. The 3-hectare farm, which Amelia's husband, Alexander Belo, inherited from his mother, is located near their home in the tropical and mountainous Quezon area.

Coconut replanting is done every quarter during the rainy season. Harvesting is done every 45 days. December through February is the best time to plant coconut seedlings. The harvest yields 1,500 to 1,800 kilograms, with most of the crop going to the supplier and some saved for family consumption. "My husband is the harvester," says Amelia, "and we do the collection and help each other during the harvest." Alexander also works as a farm worker and harvester for other farmers.

When Amelia joined the Organic/Fair Trade program, life started to improve. "There are different trainings for organic farmers that I have applied to my farm," she says. "Now we pile the leaves and husks under the tree to serve as organic fertilizer, and intercrop bananas for personal use." Initially, Amelia became a planting and re-planting technician, learning skills to improve yield and efficiency.

AMELIA BELO

Today, she is secretary of her local Fair-Trade Committee cluster (SOFACOFA). On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, she works 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the office, where she shares her knowledge with others. "I am thankful that I am a part of the Fair-Trade Committee because they taught me a lot that I can apply to make myself productive," she says. "I learn different organic farming practices and I share it with my co-farmers. I contribute opinions to the decision making for my co-members."

Supplemental income for Organic/Fair Trade coconut farmers has helped Amelia and her family achieve more financial security. "I receive an organic incentive that I add to my income for our monthly budget," she says. For Fair Trade participation, Amelia receives many benefits each year including school supplies for her children, and groceries at Christmas to offset annual expenses.

The lending program that is linked to the Fair-Trade program loaned her money to launch her small junk shop business. "The first fund for the loan came from the Fair-Trade premium to help farmers put up small businesses that will be the other source of income for our family," says Amelia.

The lending program also enabled her to build a new house for her family of seven. Her old house, made of wood and anahaw leaves, has been replaced with a stable home of stone blocks, which she is slowly furnishing. "I also have my own motorcycle that came from my income from the junk shop."

Among Amelia's five children, the youngest is 8 years old and eldest is 22 with his own family. "We live together under one roof. We are a happy family because we're together," she says. "We always go to church every Sunday; that's our bonding time." The family also enjoys picnics during Holy Week and gathering every Christmas and New Year.

"Every morning and evening, we gather for meals," says Amelia. "Whatever is on the plate, we share it and we enjoy what's given to us, but if there's some money, we buy meat and fish and everybody enjoys my cooking."

Amelia is optimistic about the future, and that of her children. "I can share my knowledge about agriculture with my children. I will encourage them to be one of us and take agriculture courses to help others to understand the importance of our job," she says. "Agriculture needs us and I want to share to all the world that we are not just farmers, but empowered farmers. We can make change. We will pass our learnings to the future and contribute to the betterment of the whole world. We just need to believe that we are not the poorest of the poor."

Anuchai Wonghyam

About 40 percent of Thailand's population works in agriculture-related jobs. Twenty-five-year-old Anuchai Wonghyam, of Thailand's central Nakhon Pathom province, is one of them. For the past two years, he has been employed at a tapioca production facility near his home, which he shares with his wife, his three-year-old son, and his father-in-law.

As a production officer at the factory, Anuchai supervises the purification of tapioca syrup. Throughout his six-day work-week, he works diligently from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. to ensure product quality, a process that involves both automation and manual control. Day by day, Anuchai stays focused on doing good work, learning, and gaining experience.

When faced with a new challenge Anuchai usually tries first to tackle it himself, viewing it as an opportunity to learn. But, thanks to a supportive, team-oriented environment, he is not afraid to ask for advice and support. "I've learned a lot from my supervisor about technique, guidelines for solving problems, and suggestions I can use in my real life," he reports. As a result, Anuchai's skills continue to improve. "On the first mistake, you might say, 'I don't know,' but a second mistake means you don't pay attention to your responsibility," he says. "Helping each other and listening to other opinions always have a good result."


Champion
Champion
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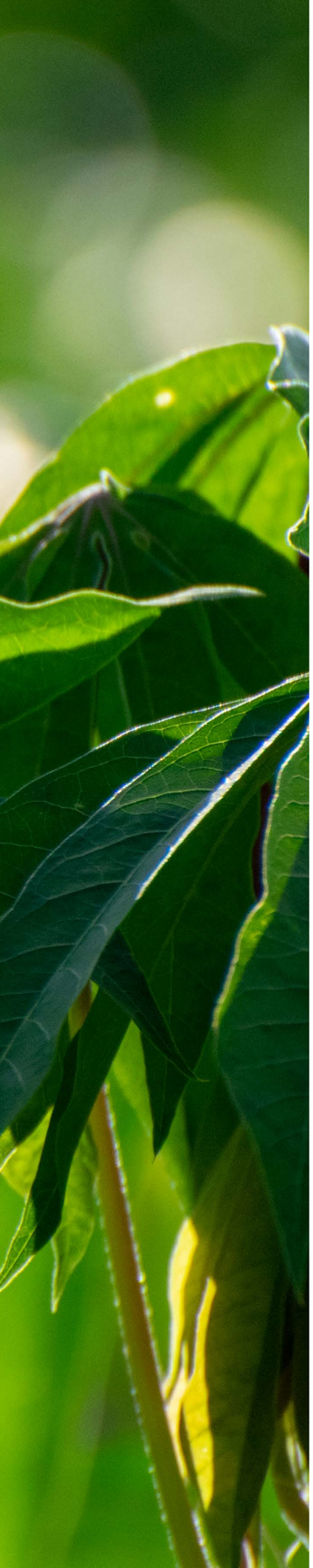
ANUCHAI WONGHYAM



With a focus on continuous learning, Anuchai hopes to rise higher in the company and take on new responsibility, a future he looks forward to with confidence.

"I BELIEVE THAT MY DETERMINATION AND DEDICATION WILL BRING A GOOD RETURN TO ME."

– ANUCHAI

For now, Anuchai's job has given him the financial stability he needs to support his family, a position he struggled to achieve before. "I love it because this job has made my life better," he says. "I have an exact salary so I can manage the expenses now for my family. Also, I like the culture and people here because they are friendly to me. This is more than a work place, but like a big family."

Life at home is also happy. Because he and his wife juggle different work schedules, they rely on Anuchai 's father-in-law to watch over their son at home. "My son is friendly, playful, and adorable," he says "and he encourages me to do more."

The whole family spends free time and holidays together, enjoying barbeque and soup, their favorite foods. "We go shopping at the market to buy fresh food to cook at home," he says. "I like this time because I have my favorite foods and times together with everyone in my family."

When the time comes, Anuchai has hopes of providing his son with access to a higher education. "I hope he has a chance to grow with quality and have a chance to find a good job."

PALM

Zeno Matins de Assis

After finishing high school in Peixe Boi, Brazil, Zeno Matins de Assis began working in the palm oil industry, eventually joining the ranks of one of the largest producers in Brazil in 1998. Since then, the 42-year-old native of Para state, has transitioned to various roles at the company, taking on greater responsibility through ongoing education, experience and dedication to his field.

Starting in the company's Phytosanitary Department, Zeno moved to the Plantation Maintenance Department in 2004 working as an Agricultural Assistant. A year later, he went back to the University for a degree in Business Management and was promoted to Agricultural Administrative Coordinator. He progressed through Transport and Logistics to Field Coordinator, responsible for harvesting, hauling, maintenance, and pruning.

As his experience and expertise grew, Zeno was promoted to Junior Manager and then to Agricultural Manager in 2013, now responsible for managing and maintaining relationships with the company's partner producers throughout the palm oil season – from planting to harvest.


ESCOLA AGROPALMA

ZENO MATINS DE ASSIS

Today, Zeno works to maintain Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) Certification for 196 family farmers and 245 larger integrated producers farming nearly 14,000 hectares of land and producing nearly 23 percent of the company's palm oil.

During the week, Zeno manages a team of 27 people who provide technical assistance to small farmers on a range of issues, including clearing and planting, fertilizing and pruning, fresh fruit bunch quality and other agronomic recommendations. He also visits three to five producers each day to ensure they comply with RSPO criteria, maintain adequate working conditions, and comply with legal requirements, such as banning child labor.

Palm oil is harvested manually with sickle, hoe, and ax. While leaves, fruit fiber, empty bunch, nut shells, and palm kernel meal are left on the ground to enrich the soil, harvested palm kernels are bagged and transported by truck to extraction units. Through technical assistance, crop cultivation and harvesting has improved for family farmers and their income has risen as well. According to 2017 figures, technical training has helped farmers shorten their pruning and maintenance cycles, and productivity has increased from 22.5 tons to 24.45 tons per hectare annually.

Palm oil is harvested every 12 days, year-round, in this hot and humid region, although high season runs from September through December. Due to this demanding schedule, Zeno lives in his company's agro-village, located in the densely tropical rural region near the fields under cultivation. Although he misses city life and close proximity to his extended family, Zeno and his family have everything they need in the village. He, his wife, Rose, and three of their four children share a comfortable three-bedroom home only 100 meters from the company-owned school, where his two sons and daughter attend. Their eldest daughter is studying nursing at the university in Belem. On weekends, the family gathers to read, relax and barbecue, and enjoy a tasty meal of stewed or roasted fish.

Zeno's desire for the future is to continue to make positive contributions. "I want to help the company grow and develop in the region, and guide the village's children to the path of personal and professional development."

OLIVE

Ahmed Msalmi

For Tunisian farmer Ahmed Msalmi, growing olives is a family tradition going back generations. “I was born in these lands 66 years ago and have lived from the olive trees all my life,” he says. “My father told me how to work with the olive trees, a skill that he learned from his father. Now I will teach what I have learned from agriculture, olives, and olive trees to my children and they will teach it to theirs.”

Ahmed and his wife work their farm together, which now spans 3,000 planted hectares in central Tunisia, a hot, semi-arid region near the cities of Sfax, Gafsa, and Sidi Bouzid. Their daily work, which varies according to the season, includes plowing fields, pruning olive trees, inspecting fields, and harvesting olives.

Olive harvesting, which begins in early November, is labor-intensive work done mostly by hand. Ahmed climbs a wooden ladder at each tree and detaches the olives with a rake, allowing them to fall to the ground onto a woven, perforated fabric laid below. The olives are detached from the leaves using a traditional sieve, then packed into cases. Loaded cases are quickly transported on tractors to the mill, where they are pressed for olive oil.

AHMED MSALMI

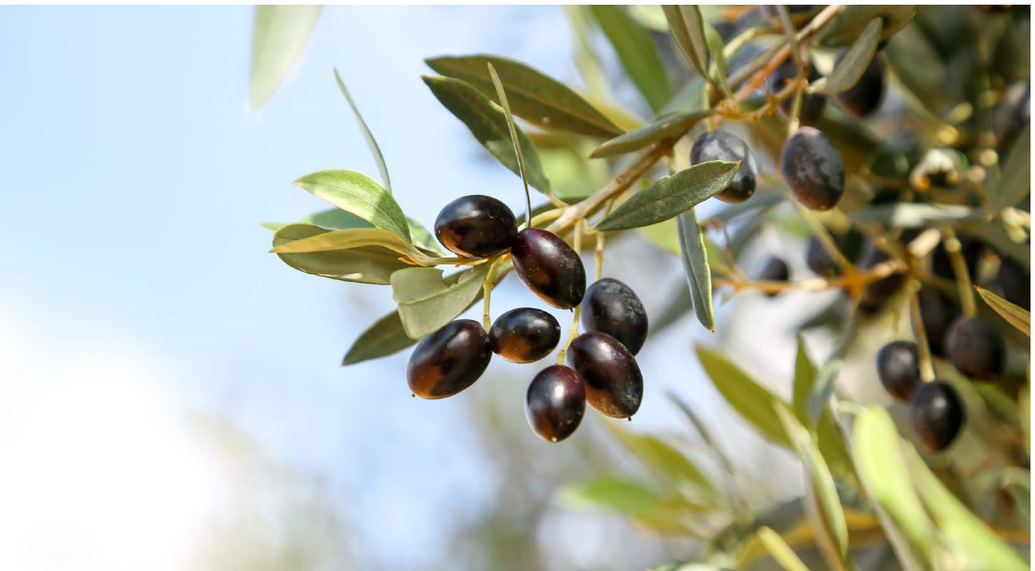
While yields per hectare vary depending on the variety of olive, access to water is the most crucial factor in determining yield. On average, irrigated fields yield 12 metric tons per hectare while rainfed fields average 2 metric tons per hectare. For Ahmed, the recent addition of water-saving technologies and the planting of new trees, has allowed him to improve farm efficiency and profitability. By 2020, he plans to have 4,000 hectares planted.

Each day, when Ahmed and his wife come home from the fields and their children return home from school, the family gathers for dinner. In the evening, they relax, watch television, visit relatives, or play sports.

The busy family often has cause to celebrate. Each religious holiday, whether it is El Aid, El Mouled, or Ramadan, has its own specific traditions. But each one brings the family together and culminates in a family meal. Traditional Tunisian couscous and Tunisian pastries are family favorites.

"WE ALSO CELEBRATE TOGETHER THE SUCCESS AND THE MARRIAGE OF OUR CHILDREN AND RELATIVES, EVEN THE START OF THE CROP IS A CELEBRATION FOR US."

— AHMED



AGAVE

Octavio Rubio

For the past 25 years, Octavio Rubio, of west-central Mexico, has worked as an agave harvester, also known as a jimador. Like his brothers-in-law who brought him into the trade, he has worked on farms throughout the region, which is known for producing agave of the highest quality.

Octavio's day begins at 4:30 a.m. when a driver picks him up to join a crew hired to harvest fields up to two hours away. Once the jimadores are gathered, they buy food for breakfast, then arrive at the field by 7 a.m. to begin the harvest. At 9:30, they break for 45 minutes to prepare breakfast of tortillas, eggs, cheese, and tomatoes, then continue harvesting until around 3 p.m.

"For harvesting, we use a coa, a sharp shovel to cut the leaves of the agave plant; a tumbador, a hook-like tool to help move around the agave piñas, and a triangulo, which is a sharpener to make sure that the tools are in top shape," he says. Working together, the jimadores cut and prepare 160 to 170 agave plants each day, which are processed into agave syrup and inulin.

OCTAVIO RUBIO

Octavio and the crew leave agave leaves in the fields to serve as a natural fertilizer for the land. They also apply organic fertilizer, a by-product of the production process, which is supplied by the agave processor.

Harvesting occasionally takes Octavio far from home for a lengthy stay, which is a personal hardship. In one instance, harvesting a large, distant field required a month away from home. But working in organic and fair-trade certified agave has also made Octavio feel valued, and secure in the knowledge that the company cares for him and for his welfare. “We have worked for several companies but never had the security as we do now,” he says. “They are very flexible with work and pay fair wages.”

Today, the married father of three earns enough to support his family on his own. “The work of a jimador is very heavy but it is also well paid,” Octavio says. “This gives my wife the opportunity to dedicate herself exclusively to the home and take care of our children.”

After work, the family spends time together relaxing, taking walks in the beautiful landscape, going to church, and socializing with family and friends.

For the future, Octavio plans to continue working as a jimador to make sure his family has the best quality of life possible. “I am very lucky to work as a jimador, we are very proud to be part of the development of a product that is shipped to different parts of the world. It feels great that other cultures get to experience what we have.”

“I AM VERY LUCKY TO WORK AS A JIMADOR . . . IT FEELS GREAT THAT OTHER CULTURES GET TO EXPERIENCE WHAT WE HAVE.

— OCTAVIO


PROPEL
22/10
Bukang-Buka ang Dibdib,
Magaan ang Katawan!
LUNGSOD NG

COCONUT

Reynaldo Maliksi

Reynaldo Maliksi has been a coconut farmer in the Philippines since he married in 1973. Now 68 years old, he still works the land he knows so well. “I do it with a lot of love, and I am very committed to keeping growing the industry of coconuts,” he says.

On a typical day, Reynaldo walks to his 3-hectare farm from his home in Bolo, Catanauan, Quezon, where he cleans the surroundings, cuts the grass, and checks the ground for fallen coconuts. When he finishes his farm chores, he returns home to cook and clean the house, or he checks in at his sari-sari store, a small convenience store he opened to supplement his income.

Reynaldo relies on his bolo knife for most day-to-day work on the coconut farm. But during harvesting, every 45 to 60 days, he rents two specialized tools: a hook to pull coconuts from the trees, and a de-husker to remove the husk from the coconut. Reynaldo uses a sharp pointed stick to pick coconuts from the ground himself, to save money. He then loads them onto paragos, a sledge pulled by a water buffalo, and transports the coconuts to the processor's warehouse.

REYNALDO MALIKSI

To maintain his fields, Reynaldo surrounds his coconut trees with discarded husks to serve as fertilizer and inhibit the growth of weeds and grasses, and he converts coconut shells into charcoal for fuel. During the rainy season, he plants new coconut seed nuts to expand his yields and he interplants bananas and other fruit trees in the coconut fields to improve efficiency, add income, and grow more food for his own consumption.

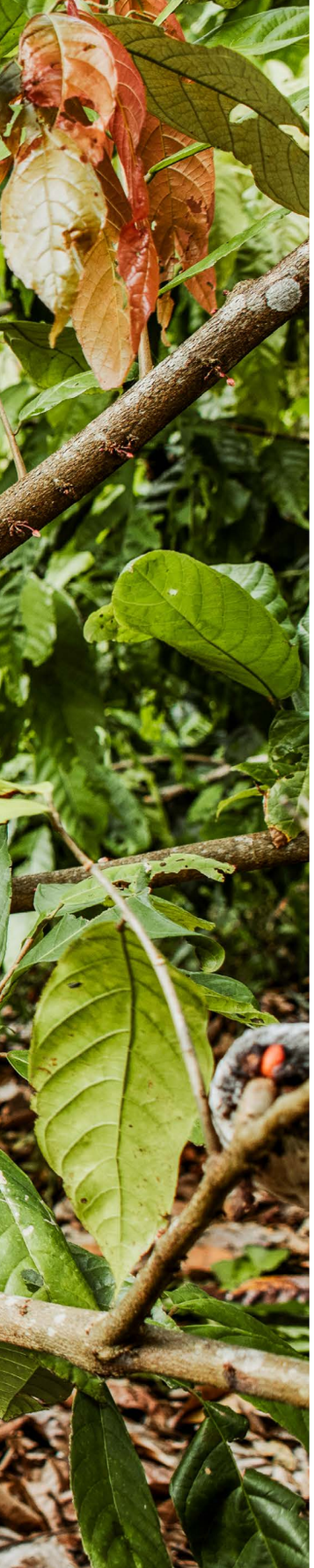
"RIGHT NOW, WITH THE ORGANIC FIELD, EVERYTHING IS BETTER." – REYNALDO

"We pollute less and give less trouble to the environment. We have a clean coconut farm, we don't contaminate the ground, and we have more."

Since his wife died in 2010, life has been quiet for Reynaldo. His five children, two daughters and three sons, are scattered throughout the Philippines and Korea. Four of them have families of their own, and one daughter lives with him and works nearby. "Everyone has their own house and their own life," he says. "We don't often see each other."

However, on special occasions, his children and their families gather at Reynaldo's house. "We spend time together every Holy Week and Christmas," he says. "I see my grandchildren and catch up with their life, and to celebrate, we eat delicious foods that are not ordinary like lechon (roast suckling pig)."


35
Years



COCOA

Jesus Guevara

Jesus Guevara farms 4 hectares of level farmland, about 20 kilometers from the city of Tarapoto in northern Peru's Lamas province. Now aged 45, he cultivated his first crops 23 years ago, after purchasing the farm from his mother. Over the years, he has cultivated oranges, bananas, and cassava, but today, Jesus' main crop is cocoa.

Jesus leaves home at 8 a.m. and heads to the cocoa fields for the day, often with his wife, Korina Aspajo. During the growing season, they protect the delicate cocoa trees from pests and disease, and guard them from the damaging wind and sun that typify the region's tropical environment. While it is possible to plant and harvest cocoa at any time of the year in Peru's temporate climate, the prime harvest season is June through October.

JESUS GUEVARA

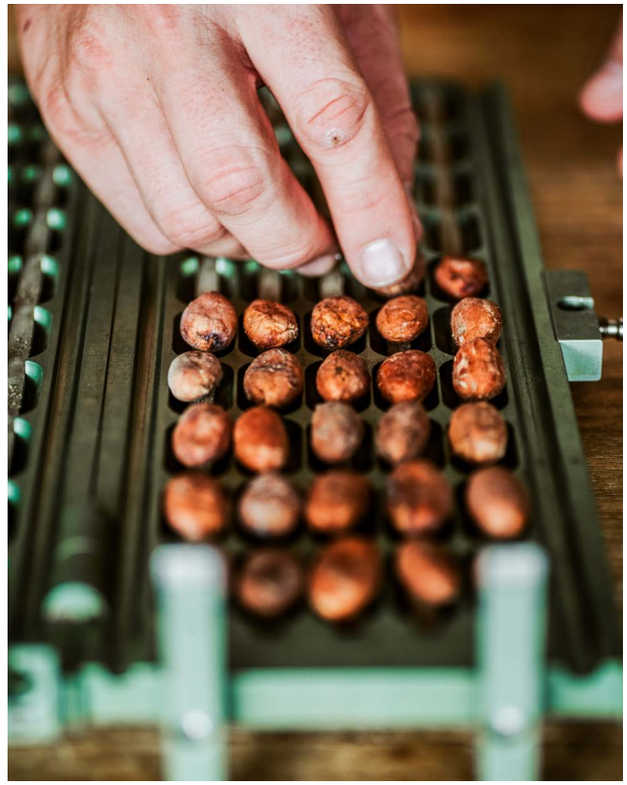
Harvesting cocoa is labor intensive and physically demanding. Jesus uses scissors to remove cobs from the trees' lower levels, then switches to sickles to remove cobs on the trees' upper branches. Once cobs are removed, they are split open with machetes and the cocoa beans are scooped out, packed into jute bags, and transported by mototaxi to the processor. Cocoa leaves and cob husks are left on the fields to enrich the soil for future crops.

Partnering with the region's largest organic distributor has helped Jesus improve his farming operation significantly. Thanks to the company's training and technical assistance, Jesus has increased production levels to about 700 kilograms of organic cocoa per hectare. His organic cocoa sells at a higher price than conventional cocoa.

On a typical day, Jesus heads home to his wife and two daughters at about 4 p.m. to rest and enjoy the evening. One daughter, a recent high school graduate, is hoping to continue her studies once she secures the money, and the youngest daughter is still in school. His eldest son, married with a family of his own, lives nearby.

Family favorites of rice with chicken, and juane, a traditional Peruvian dish, are often prepared for dinner at home during the week. On the weekends, the family takes walks together and shops for what they need for the week. Sometimes they dine together at local restaurants. They look forward to the village festivities of Fiesta de San Juan each June, an annual celebration in the district of Tabalosos.

Although he worries about security due to juvenile delinquency in the area, life in Jesus' agricultural community is generally good. While nearby farmers grow coffee, fruits, and livestock, Jesus hopes to expand his farm to produce more cocoa to achieve better economic sustenance for his family.

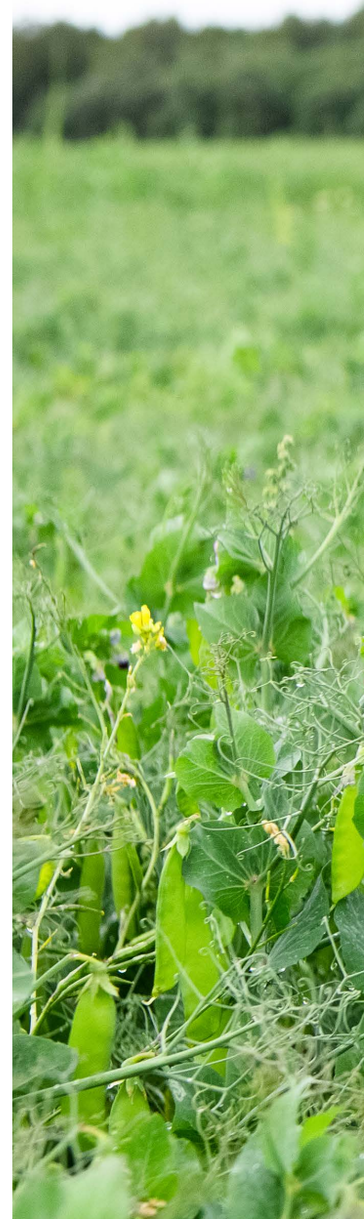


Andrejs Hansons

Seventy-two-year-old Andrejs Hansons has experienced a world of change since he was born into Latvia in 1947. Following World War II, the country was annexed by the Soviet Union, leaving the choices most of us take for granted – what to study, where to live, where to work – to be dictated by the government.

After graduating in 1975 as a food technology engineer, Andrejs was sent to northern Latvia to build a potato starch factory. His wife, also a food engineer, was employed in the same unit and followed him there. By moving to the remote area, the couple was granted an apartment of their own in the small village of Ungurpils.

For decades, Andrejs worked as a manager in the factory, the poor village's largest employer. He became a highly respected figure in the community and accepted responsibility for the residents' well-being. With only one car in the village, he made sure the young mothers were transported to the hospital to give birth. When the Soviet currency was abolished, he made sure an elderly villager didn't lose his life savings.



ANDREJS HANSONS

After Latvia declared independence in 1990 following the collapse of the Soviet Union, a market economy began to emerge. There was much to learn. “People didn’t understand what markets were,” says Andrejs. He banded together with co-workers to run the factory as a cooperative. He searched old documents to locate where his product had always been shipped. “We traveled to find those people and were able to develop a customer base,” he says proudly. “We learned to sell.”

As money flowed in, the cooperative paved village roads and installed electricity in residents’ houses. “We didn’t pocket the money as many people in similar situations did at that time,” he says. “Before and after that, nobody has paved roads here.” However, when the nearby collective farm was abolished and the lands were returned to former owners, their potato supply ended. Andrejs was determined to keep the business going. “Financing was not available – only loans with 100 to 200 percent interest,” he says. “I did not touch that money, otherwise, I wouldn’t be here.”

Instead, Andrejs happened upon a group representing a Swedish potato starch manufacturer who was looking for contacts in Latvia. After meeting, they formed a joint venture granting the Swedish company 35 percent, with 65 percent held by the Latvian cooperative, including Andrejs. Swedish production know-how and used equipment helped, but the potato supply remained a problem. Faced with hardship, most of the cooperative owners sold out quickly, but lost all their money. Andrejs hung on.

When he finally sold his shares years later – the last cooperative member to sell – he was prepared to tackle a new challenge by combining his experience with potato starch and his love for organic agriculture.

Andrejs and partner, Janis Varpa, began experimenting in 2010 with combining potato pulp – a by-product of potato starch production – with grass to produce vermicompost (a composting process using worms to break down organic matter). Their collaboration led them to form a new company which produces organic starch potatoes, brown peas, oats, buckwheat, and grass in a crop rotation.

Over the past nine years, the company has purchased 150 hectares of farmland and 100 hectares of forest in scattered areas throughout Latvia. The planting and harvesting is outsourced to locals. Seasonality on a farm without animals is a challenge, but Andrejs is exploring forestry as a possible means to provide year-round employment to the farm workers. In the end, although his only animals are worms, and he seldom sits high on a tractor, Andrejs is a farmer indeed whose drive, vision and confidence has allowed him to success in the world’s growing organic industry.

PALM

Vinicio Moreno

Farming for Vinicio Moreno is a family affair. A prolonged drought in his native region of southern Ecuador prompted him, along with his parents, his wife, and their two children to seek a new life elsewhere. “We heard there was a chance to get some land in this region,” he recalls. “The situation was really bad, so we had nothing to lose, and decided to move here.”

In Puerto Quito, Pichincha, Ecuador, Vinicio and his family found the land they hoped for in 1969. “We found this very lush, water-blessed paradise, so we decided to stay here and cultivate oil palm.”

Today, the family owns a 60-hectare farm dedicated to organic palm oil production. “The farm belongs in equal parts to my mother, my father, my wife, and myself,” he says. The family works the land together.

VINICIO MORENO

From long experience, Vinicio understood the importance of protecting the land's water resources. So, in preparing the land, the family took great care to protect large tracts of the original vegetation, especially in those areas near streams and ponds.

Vinicio made other changes as well. In the past, he had typically used chemical fertilizers. Even though he wore protective clothing, he often felt tired or ill and suffered from skin lesions. At his wife's insistence, he was thoroughly tested at a nearby hospital, which found high toxicity levels in his blood and liver. The testing was an eye-opener for Vinicio. "I understood that what I was doing to the land of the farm, our land, was simply poisoning it," he says. "So, we decided what we had been doing for years was clearly wrong and we should go back to the natural ways our ancestors practiced to grow food."

Looking for an alternative, Vinicio and his family turned to a regional organic food distributor, who supported their efforts to shift their plantation to organic management. Since then, farm production has increased.

Organic farming practices have also improved their health immeasurably and given the family peace of mind. "I feel well, have not been sick in a long time, and most of all, we know that our children will not get sick when they run around and play in the plantation," he says.

Today, Vinicio and his family look to the future with confidence. "We will be able to keep living on this land knowing that whatever we plant here will be done in a rich, healthy way, free of harmful chemicals, free of poison."

TAPIOCA | CASSAVA

Airton Marioti

Cassava farmer Airton Marioti, has farmed Brazil's tropical Parana region all his life, shifting his crops to accommodate changing market conditions. Last year he grew organic soybeans, but this year, he made some changes. He devoted a third of his family's 9-hectare farm to corn, another third to grass to feed his beef cattle, and the remaining third to organic cassava, a root vegetable also known as tapioca, manioc or yuca.

Cassava is considered a one-year crop in Brazil's hot and hilly terrain. Planting is typically done in September and requires at least eight months before harvest. Yields peak between eight and ten months, when roots are fully developed, and bring twice the price of corn.

Airton's crop, planted nearly five months ago, includes two different types of cassava. The large-leafed plant contains less starch and is grown for the fresh market. The smaller-leafed plant, which has a higher starch content, is sold to a nearby organic supplier he has worked with for the past nine years. There, it is processed into food starch and flour.

AIRTON MARIOTI

On a typical day, Airton leaves his home in the city of Realeza in the early morning and rides his motorcycle to the farm to manage the day's tasks. When plants are small, he uses a weeding machine attached to a tractor to keep the fields clear, but when plants are larger most of the work is done manually. Days are much longer during planting and harvesting seasons, a challenge his family used to tackle together. However, farm work eventually left his wife with injuries that ended her ability to help. His son now works in his uncle's bike shop, and his daughter is studying at the university. His grandson sometimes helps on the farm, but Airton is still short-handed during the busy seasons. Today, during peak times, he contracts with farm workers referred through his supply partner.

For now, Airton plans to keep improving the land by reducing erosion and incorporating more organic fertilizers to improve production. And while he feels his farm is manageable for now, he can foresee a time when he'll need more help. "In my heart, I want to stay farming," he says. He hopes that his grandson will maintain his interest and someday take control.

“IN MY HEART, I WANT TO STAY FARMING.”

— AIRTON

RICE

Muhammad Suleman

Since 1990, Muhammed Suleman has farmed the land near his home in Khanaban Zila, Muridke, in Pakistan's Punjab region. Today, at age 50, he owns 10 hectares of farmland devoted to organic basmati rice, wheat, corn, and animal feed. Although his farm is larger than most, in recent years, he has also contracted to farm an additional 4 hectares.

While each crop has its own season, every planting process begins by measuring the fields. "We level the land through laser for sowing in June," he says. Rice cultivation begins in July and is then harvested in November, both manually and with machines.

Harvesting presents a challenge. A typical harvesting machine cuts the plant too high on the stalk, producing losses and lower yield. A Japanese-made Kubota chopper, on the other hand, eliminates loss and improves yield by cutting the plant at the root, but it's very expensive and hard to get. "At the time of harvesting, machines are booked by the big landlords so they are not available for us to rent," he says. Securing a Kubota machine for harvesting is a recurring objective to reduce crop losses and save time.

MUHAMMAD SULEMAN

"Farmers work very hard; their whole life is so tough," says Muhammed. As a result, he and his neighbors, also farmers with lands nearby, frequently exchange ideas, labor, and machines. "All of us live together in unity and help each other in difficult times."

In recent years, Muhammed has also worked more closely with his supply partner as a member of the company's Kisan Dost (Farmer's Friend) program. Participation in the program has helped him improve his farm's efficiency, yield, and ultimately, his profitability.

"WE MET WITH EXPERTS WHO GAVE US BETTER IDEAS AND TRAINING ON BETTER FARMING." – MUHAMMAD

"Their follow-ups from sowing to harvesting help us to increase our yield per hectare. Their team also provides us seeds and water gauging tools." As a result, rice yield has grown from 3 tons per hectare to more than 4.5 tons per hectare. As an organic farmer, Muhammed also receives an annual premium of 5,000 rupees per ton of rice paddy.

Last year, Muhammed used his improved income to renovate his family's home, where he lives with his wife and five children, including three boys and two girls. "All my children are going to school," he says. "My elder daughter is in 10th grade, and my younger girl recently got the first position in the entire Zila."

As a homemaker, Muhammed's wife manages the family and brings meals to share with her husband when he's at work on the farm. "She gives me good advice in farming," says Muhammed. "She uses the Internet and tells me time to time how we can make more profit or increase the yield."

At home, the family cooks pulao rice dishes or treats the children to burgers or pizza in Muridke. On weekends the family travels to nearby parks or family festivals, or visits their relatives in Lahore.

In the near future, Muhammed plans to increase his farmland to 18 hectares, thanks to his confidence in the Kisan Dost program. "The team helps us perform better and increase our yields every time," he says. "Now they are also supporting us by purchasing our crop at good rates, and this gives us good motivation."

“ALL OF US LIVE TOGETHER IN UNITY AND HELP EACH OTHER IN DIFFICULT TIMES.”

— MUHAMMAD

HONEY

José da Cruz Deusdeth

At age 45, José da Cruz Deusdeth has worked numerous jobs over the years. Like many others in the Fonseca district of Minas Gerais, he started in iron mining, then switched to eucalyptus cultivation on a plantation in the region. There, 12 years ago, he discovered beekeeping, which has become his true calling.

Today, José lives a quiet and happy life in Alvinópolis, Brazil, with his wife, Matilde, and son, Roberto. Through his beekeeping business, he provides honey to the large honey exporter in the region, a way of life he finds safe, tranquil, and satisfying.

José has enlarged his bee operation gradually over the years, now managing 15 apiaries with about 200 hives within 50 kilometers of his home. His apiaries are placed along the edges of eucalyptus plantations and in natural forestlands. Others, located on private properties, are installed in exchange for a fee.

Harvesting, which is done twice a year, is Jose's busiest time. The first harvest begins in summer and lasts into autumn, from February to April. He reaps a second harvest in early spring, in September and October.

JOSÉ DA CRUZ DEUSDETH

José manages the harvest by himself, traveling to apiaries in his pickup truck or van to retrieve honey. Because the producer prefers to process all harvested honey on the same day, José added a honey house to the back of his own house. His wife helps him clean and maintain equipment and tools there, but he handles the rest. “I have had a helper, but by working by myself, I have more autonomy and freedom of action,” he says, “and I can be closer to my family.” With honey production exceeding six tons per year, Jose achieves a good standard of living.

At this stage, José does not plan to increase the number of apiaries or beehives. “I hope I can keep up with the pace and maybe increase a bit in volume,” he says. “I would not be able to take more than that, but I still prefer to work by myself.”

José’s busy family is the center of his life. He eats lunch at home every day and returns home each evening to enjoy time with Matilde and nine-year-old Roberto. “I like the simplicity of life living with my family,” he says. “We talk to a neighbor, visit a friend, welcome someone here at home.”

Besides caring for the house and their son, Matilde cultivates aromatic and medicinal herbs. Roberto is bright, curious and creative, with a talent for arts and crafts. “I like to draw and make small animals using paper cut-outs,” he says, proudly showing paper sculptures of insects he learned about in school. “It is my art,” he says. “How far can my art go? Nobody knows, right?”

For José, providing his son with education and opportunity is his only concern for the future. As for himself, his dream has been fulfilled with his beekeeping and a quiet life with his family.

“I’M HAPPY AND THAT IS WHAT I WANT TO KEEP.” – JOSÉ


SEVA

COCONUT

Edilberto + Olalia Dapito

Coconut farming has always been a way of life for Edilberto and Olalia Dapito, of the Philippines. Edilberto's parents were coconut farmers, as were Olalia's grandparents, who raised her. They continued the tradition when they married in 1984, and now, in their mid-50s, they have raised three children and continue to work their coconut farm together.

The Dapitos manage their own 6-hectare farm in Don Tomas, plus two other farms owned by Edilberto's siblings: three hectares in Lawahan, about 9 kilometers from their home, and another three hectares in Maulawin.

Coconuts are harvested every 45 days. On those days, the couple go to the fields together at 7 a.m. with tools and a cart, dressed in jackets and boots to guard against snakes. Edilberto cuts the coconuts from the trees using a kawit, a long pole with an attached hook blade, and removes the husks. Olalia then gathers the fallen coconuts from the ground and loads them onto a cart pulled by a carabao, a native water buffalo. "We do this the whole day," says Olalia. "We don't hire farm hands much so we do things ourselves. This way, we can save money on the farm hands' wages."

EDILBERTO + OLALIA DAPITO

Coconut yield varies significantly depending on the season. During a dry spell, yields average 1,200 to 1,500 coconuts per hectare, and they tend to be very small. A good season brings in as much as 7,000 coconuts per hectare.

Through much of their marriage, the Dapitos' top priority was raising and educating their children. Despite the high costs, the couple managed to send each one to college and see them through. "They have stayed at dormitories and boarding houses to study and we've supported them so they can finish school," says Olalia. When necessary, Edilberto took on extra farm work and carpentry jobs, in addition to his own farm work, for extra income.

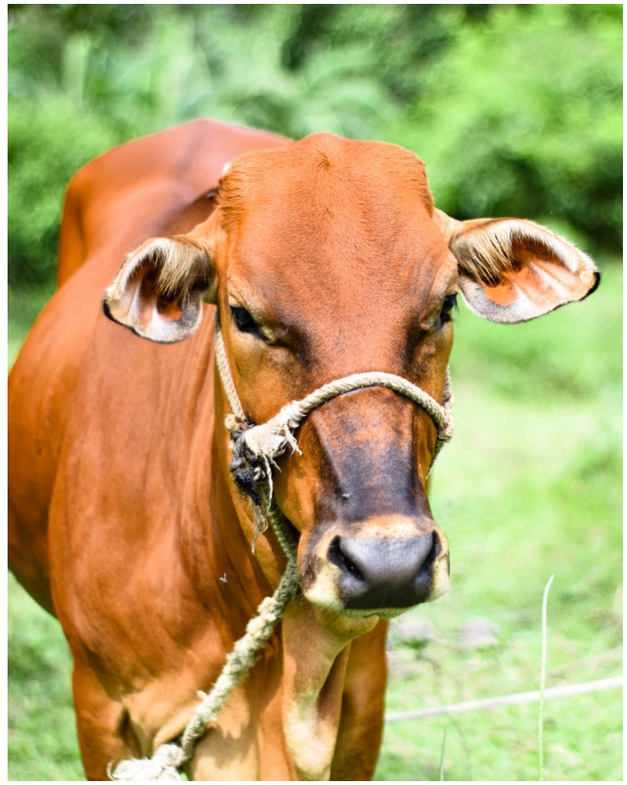
Today, daughters Annaliza and Donna, have completed their college degrees in Education and work as teachers. Their son, Albert, is finishing his degree in Criminology and recently passed his exams to become a police officer in Legazpi, about four hours away.

"WE'RE VERY HAPPY AND PROUD." – EDILBERTO

Now, at age 57 and 53, respectively, Edilberto and Olalia are starting to make some changes in their day to day lives. Their eldest daughter, Annaliza, her husband and three children live with them and their son-in-law helps on the farm. They've also started hiring help during coconut harvesting. "I'm a bit older so that job hurts my eyes," says Edilberto. "I still do the other things with the help of my son-in-law."

With college expenses behind them, the couple saved and purchased two tricycles for additional income. The tricycles (three-wheeled vehicles similar to a Thai tuktuk) allow the Dapitos to offer rides to villagers in an area where there is little access to public transportation. "I work on the farm for three days out of a week," says Edilberto. "For the other four days, I drive the tricycle. My son-in-law drives the other tricycle. I gave that to him so that he also has extra income for his family."

While the men drive the tricycles, Olalia handles the coconut business and takes care of the farm animals. On the weekends, she buys and sells bananas and saba at the fresh market in St. Elena, about 13 kilometers from home.




SEVA

EDILBERTO + OLALIA DAPITO

Now, the Dapitos are working toward a new goal: building a new house. “Our siblings all have large cement houses, but we prioritized our children’s college education so we had to delay the house,” says Edilberto. “We’re working on that now.”

Despite their busy schedule, the Dapitos see their family as often as possible. When school is out or holidays come around, all the children come home to visit. “The house becomes noisy and fun when everyone is around” says Olalia. “We prepare simple meals and gather together around the table and spend the day together.” The family eats vegetables, and focuses on healthy eating to manage Olalia’s diabetes.

Despite their health challenges, Edilberto and Olalia have no plans to retire anytime soon. “We’ll work as long as we can so that we don’t have to depend on our children,” says Olalia. But when they’re forced to give up coconut farming, they plan to pass the farm on to their sons-in-law to manage. “They’ve been coconut farmers all their lives, too, since their parents are also coconut farmers,” says Edilberto. “They will inherit the land.”

The couple are grateful for the life their farm has provided them and are hopeful for the future.

“Coconuts are the reason my husband and I were able to send our children to school and to college,” says Olalia. “The farm will help them later on to take care of their own children as well.”

Kurt Foitongsamrong

Farmer Kurt Foitongsamrong begins his day in the kitchen, cooking for his children, before packing his lunch box and heading off to work the land. As a native of Amphur Huaytalang, Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand, Kurt made the decision five years earlier to certify his farm and begin growing organic tapioca.

Tapioca, the starchy root of the cassava plant, is a staple food in tropical regions around the world, including Thailand. The hot and humid climate in Kurt's region is ideal for tapioca cultivation. The region experiences a hot and dry season from March through mid-May and a rainy season from mid-May through October, which can be quite heavy and result in flooding.

Organic tapioca roots are typically planted in March and harvested up to a year later. At harvest time, Kurt cuts the plant at its base, saving the trunks growing above the ground to replant for next year's crop. Once the trunks are removed, he uses a tractor to dig the roots from the ground and remove them for transport and processing. The 300-rai field where he works, approximately 48 hectares in size, yields about 3,000 metric tons of tapioca roots per harvest, which is processed into tapioca starch and powders.

KURT FOITONGSAMRONG

After harvest, Kurt and his fellow workers shovel the plowed dirt to level the fields and prepare for replanting. The saved cassava trunks are then re-planted to begin the next crop, a process that takes about two weeks.

Since his return to organic agriculture, Kurt has noticed a significant improvement in his own wellbeing and the health of the land around him. “There is no insecticide contamination, which is a benefit to me and everyone who works here,” he says. “I used to have unusual big belly symptoms when I was doing conventional agriculture but now it is gone. More importantly, other creatures like birds, mice, chickens, and iguanas are back in the area, which shows the abundance of nature.”

On a typical day, Kurt returns home from work to tend his ducks, chickens, and vegetable garden before preparing dinner for his family. Then he and his family relax and watch television until bedtime, around 9 p.m.

Kurt hopes that his children can follow his path into organic agriculture, so that they can live good lives in a sustainable way.

“I REALLY WANT TO INVITE EVERYONE TO DO AGRICULTURE IN AN ORGANIC WAY, WE ARE SIMPLY LIVING HEALTHY LIVES.”

— KURT

COCOA

Eustaquia Morena

Eustaquia Morena was born into a family of cocoa farmers and remembers helping on the plantation as a child. Now, at age 54, she and her husband cultivate organic cocoa on their own farm near the Dominican Republic's regional capital of Yamasa, the country's primary cocoa growing area. "I like working with cocoa," she says, "That's what I have done my whole life."

Some of Eustaquia's work is done at home, where she receives fresh cocoa beans from farmers in the area. Otherwise, she works on her family's cocoa plantation. On those days, she and her husband rise early, prepare their tools, and pack food for their horses and the work crew. Then they walk an hour and a half from their small village of La Parcela to their 3-hectare plantation. "It's more than the one to two hectares most farmers have," she says. "But we have the disadvantage that our plantation is far away and it takes a lot of effort to get there and back."

During cultivation, the men use machetes to trim the trees, remove weeds, or plant seedlings in open spaces to improve efficiency and yields. "We are doing this constantly," Eustaquia says. "It is part of the job."

EUSTAQUIA MORENA

During the harvest, they cut the high-hanging mazorcas (pods) from the cocoa trees with a knife fixed to a long wooden stick. Then they open the mazorcas with a machete, remove the pulp with the beans, and place them into bags. At mid-day, Eustaquia cooks lunch for the plantation crew, then they return to their work. At the end of the day, the heavy bags are loaded onto the horses and they walk an hour and a half back to the village, where Eustaquia does chores and prepares supper. “The horses are very important for us. Without them we could not transport the beans over such a long distance,” she says. “We own one horse and rent another one if needed.”

Because some mazorcas ripen in the cocoa trees throughout the year, Eustaquia and her husband visit the plantatation at least every 15 days to harvest them, along with the other fruits that are interspersed with the cocoa trees – oranges, bitter oranges, lemons, bananas, plantains, breadfruit, avocado, yams and taro.

However, the main cocoa harvest lasts from March to July. These months also make up the rainy season, making harvesting more difficult and increasing the risk of disease. The second harvest, in December and January, produces a smaller yield. Typically, their plantation averages 600 kilograms per hectare each year, although a poor season last year brought them only 400 kilograms per hectare.

In her free time, Eustaquia attends church three times a week, and relaxes at home with her husband. On the weekends, their two daughters often visit with their husbands and five grandchildren. “One lives in the capital and studied computer sciences at university,” she says. “The second daughter lives in the neighbour village and is becoming an accountant. Both daughters have small cocoa plantations, which they received from my husband and me.”

The family also gathers to celebrate birthdays and major holidays such as Semana Santa, Christmas, and the New Year with traditional dinners of beans, rice, manioc, and plantains with either beef, pork, or chicken.

After a lifetime of cocoa farming Eustaquia is convinced that organic farming improves farmers’ health and livelihood. “We receive a premium for the organic cocoa, which is relevant for our income and allows us to make investments,” she says. “The most important thing is, that we don’t poison the environment and can offer healthy products.”

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— EUSTAQUIA

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