

FROM TREE TO TREAT



Chocolate Farming

The cacao tree grows in the tropics. This delicate tree lives in the understory of the tropical forest, where it is sheltered from the sun and wind by taller trees.



In the past, some cacao farmers cut down large sections of rain forest to open up new fields to grow a hybrid variety of the cacao tree without shade. In addition to destroying valuable rain forest land, farmers needed to apply chemical fertilizers and pesticides to ensure the growth of the hybrid trees.

Fortunately, most of today's cacao farms practice sustainable methods of growing cacao under the shade of taller trees. Sustainable farmers use environmentally-friendly techniques such as planting tall, beneficial, native crops such as banana, cashew, or coconut trees among the cacao trees, thus providing shade canopy. These "shade farms" provide the habitat needed to host the insects that naturally pollinate the cacao as well as those that feast on cacao pests. These types of farms also maintain the natural systems that keep the soil fertile—eliminating the need for chemical fertilizers.

Harvesting Cacao Seeds

Chocolate is made from the seeds of the cacao tree. They grow in a football-shaped fruit called a pod. Farmers harvest the pods by hand, then cut them open and scoop out the pulp and seeds, which they cover with burlap or banana leaves, or place in wooden boxes, to ferment. This process reduces the cacao's natural bitterness and begins to release the chocolate flavor. After a few days of fermentation, the seeds from the cacao pod darken into

rich brown cacao beans, which the farmer dries in the sun before taking them to a collection site for shipment to chocolate factories around the world.



There are three main varieties of cacao tree:

- ➔ **Criollo** produces a very high quality bean. It is most rare and highly prized for its flavor. It is grown mainly in Central America and the Caribbean.
- ➔ **Forastero**, cultivated in Africa and Brazil, produces a bean with a strong chocolate taste. It provides approximately 80% of the world's cacao.
- ➔ **Trinitario**, a disease-resistant and easily-cultivated cross between the Criollo and the Forastero, has smooth pods and flavorful beans. It is grown mainly in Central and South America and Asia.



Now it's time to find out more. With your team, do some research to learn more about sustainable cacao farming and how sustainable farming practices may be applied to growing other tropical crops such as sugar cane, coconut palm trees, and coffee. Present what you have learned to your classmates.

Use the space below to begin focusing your thoughts.

You can use the back of this paper to make notes.



To learn more about how cocoa is grown and chocolate is made, visit **The Story of Chocolate** at www.thestoryofchocolate.com.

