

ecolechocolat chocolate masters hangouts On Air!

For immediate release

August 22, 2013



Chocolate Masters Hangout - Save Our Chocolat!

Saving the world's finest-tasting heirloom chocolate from extinction

Lovers of fine chocolate may be wondering if their favorite treat is on the brink of extinction, following reports that many third-world cacao farmers of rare chocolate strains are struggling to stay afloat.

They have reason to worry, but they'll be heartened to hear of the passionate efforts now underway to save that tiny fraction - that five per cent - of the world's cacao forests that produce the finest-tasting chocolates.

Behind the race to save fine-flavor chocolate from being lost forever is the Heirloom Cacao Preservation Initiative (HCP), which is the focus of the next Ecole Chocolat Chocolate Masters Hangout on Google+ airing Thursday, Sept. 5 at 11 a.m. PDT.

Joining Ecole Chocolat founder and HCP founding member Pam Williams on the latest Hangout panel are other HCP founding members Dan Pearson of Marañón Chocolate (Pearson stumbled upon one of the world's rarest and finest-tasting cacao beans while sourcing bananas in the Peru), Jim Eber, public relations specialist and currently HCP Director of Administration and Communication, and Lyndel Meinhardt, Research Leader, Sustainable Perennial Crops Laboratory, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture/Agricultural Research Service.

evaluate flavor and then works through a privately funded cooperative agreement between the Fine Chocolate Industry Association (FCIA) and the USDA's Agricultural Research Service to plot the links between the flavor traits and their DNA signatures," says Williams.

And the HCP, she says, is on track of achieving its goal to identify strains of rare chocolate worth protecting and preserving.

So how does this filter down to the fine-chocolate lover?

"The best thing us chocolate lovers can do is to support people working in the fine-chocolate industry, so they in turn can continue to support the farmers who grow fine chocolate. That's what we'll be discussing on our next Hangout," says Williams.

Williams, whose Ecole Chocolat school of chocolate arts and chocolate making celebrated its 10th anniversary this year, says the Chocolate Masters Hangouts have been a huge success to date. Over the last two months Ecole Chocolat's Google+ followers have grown to an astonishing 180,000.

"I'm thrilled at the response," she says. "We do strive to make the programs both topical and educational and I think the numbers show we're succeeding at that. We try to bring people into the conversation who are both passionate about chocolate and extremely knowledgeable about their part in the industry. I think this is why we've drawn so much interest to date. We all love fine chocolate and with the HCP, we want to preserve cacao's different and unique flavors for generations to come."

Ecole Chocolat's Chocolate Masters Hangout:

<http://www.google.com/+ecolechocolat>

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MORE INFORMATION:

Included on the Hangout Panel are Fine Chocolate Industry Association (FCIA) member volunteers who founded the HCP and are responsible for leading its ongoing efforts:

Dan Pearson, Marañón Chocolate
Pam Williams, Ecole Chocolat
Jim Eber, Heirloom Cacao Preservation Initiative
Lyndel Meinhardt, USDA/ARS

Dan Pearson of Marañón Chocolate, together with business partner Brian Horsley, began sourcing fruit in Peru in 2002. While sourcing bananas in the jungle canyon of Marañón, in 2007 they came upon cacao trees with 40 percent white beans. They weren't sure what they had found, but soon learned it was Pure Nacional, thought to have become extinct after being struck by disease in 1916 in Ecuador. Finding these very rare cacao beans was the beginning of Pearson's journey into the world of chocolate and led to his involvement in founding the HCP.

Pam Williams of Ecole Chocolat Professional School of Chocolate Arts, has been involved in the chocolate industry since 1981. In 2003, she founded Ecole Chocolat to deliver high quality educational programs focused on chocolate to students all

Recognition of Excellence in Service to the Industry. She has been very concerned about the loss of fine flavor cacao and worked closely with Pearson and Meinhardt to help make the HCP Initiative a reality.

Lyndel Meinhardt is Research Leader, Sustainable Perennial Crops Laboratory, USDA/ARS. The Sustainable Perennial Crops Laboratory does research on tropical perennial crops of significance to national and global economies. Cacao is one of the crops Meinhardt has researched for many years and after seeing the field losses, he recognized the importance of acting quickly to save fine-flavor cacao. He's worked closely on the HCP Initiative as its science adviser since its inception three years ago.

Jim Eber has nearly two decades experience in public relations, marketing, and collaborating on books and projects with personalities and brands. He has been directly involved in the launch of 14 New York Times bestsellers and worked with Williams on their book: Raising the Bar - The Future of Fine Chocolate. Eber is currently working with the Fine Chocolate Industry Association as Director of Administration and Communication for the Heirloom Cacao Preservation Initiative.

The Heirloom Cacao Preservation Initiative

The idea for the HCP emerged in 2010 when Fine Chocolate Industry Association (FCIA) members met with the USDA-ARS, which thought its lab could help the members identify fine-flavor cacao using the samples in the existing worldwide database. Shared concern led to instant action: the FCIA got its membership on board, and in December 2011, the FCIA established a specific cooperative agreement with the USDA-ARS to develop their ideas further. Twenty-five chocolate companies and industry stakeholders - 92% of whom are artisan and small independents including Dandelion Chocolate, Guittard Chocolate, Chocolates El Rey, and Fran's Chocolates - stepped up to provide funding in 2012 as Founding Circle members, allowing the HCP to officially launch in June 2012 and move forward.

Other upcoming Chocolate Masters Hangout Dates:

Sept. 26, 2013 11:00 AM PDT

Oct. 24, 2013 11:00 AM PDT

Nov. 21, 2013 11:00 AM PDT

About Ecole Chocolat

Founded in 2003, Ecole Chocolat Professional School of Chocolate Arts offers a portfolio of programs for chocolate making - mastering techniques while gaining the expertise and business knowledge needed to become a professional chocolatier or chocolate maker. Ecole Chocolat's founder Pam Williams is the recipient of the Award of Excellence in Service to the Industry from the Fine Chocolate Industry Association. For more information, see our website: <http://www.ecolechocolat.com>

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