

THE SWEET SMELL OF SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

Madagascar RPCVs pioneer a “bean to bar” chocolate company

by JoAnna Haugen

For many people, the idea of working in the chocolate industry is a dream job. But if you redefine a chocolate product so that it's more than a just a sweet dessert and instead represents a sustainable, value-added solution in a developing country, it becomes a dream job made for a team of former Peace Corps Volunteers.

Founded in March 2006, Madécasse is a chocolate production company based out of Madagascar. It doesn't have the name recognition of Nestlé or the bank account of Hershey, but what it lacks in mainstream status, Madécasse makes up for in social innovation. The company is the brainchild of Tim McCollum and Brett Beach (Madagascar 99-01), both of whom recognized that Madagascar's rich cocoa resources were not benefiting local communities and that people around the world didn't have exposure to the high quality beans coming out of that corner of the world. They teamed up with the Ezaka Cocoa Cooperative, took out the middlemen, brought a local chocolatier into the picture and Madécasse was born. Joe Salvatore (Madagascar 06-08) joined the team as marketing director about a year and a half ago, and the company now offers products in approximately 700 stores in 45 states across the United States as well as online. Fast Company recently named Madécasse as one of the world's 50 most innovative companies.

Running Madécasse is more than a full-time job for the three former volunteers, and Salvatore says it's the Peace Corps mentality that makes it work. "It's not just a job, it's a passion," he says. "It's something we really believe in."

Madécasse is also more than just a run-of-the-mill

chocolate company. One of the things that makes it stand out from other similar companies in developing countries is the fact that it's not marketed as "fair trade." "Fair trade just isn't enough," Salvatore says. "We can do a lot more than that."

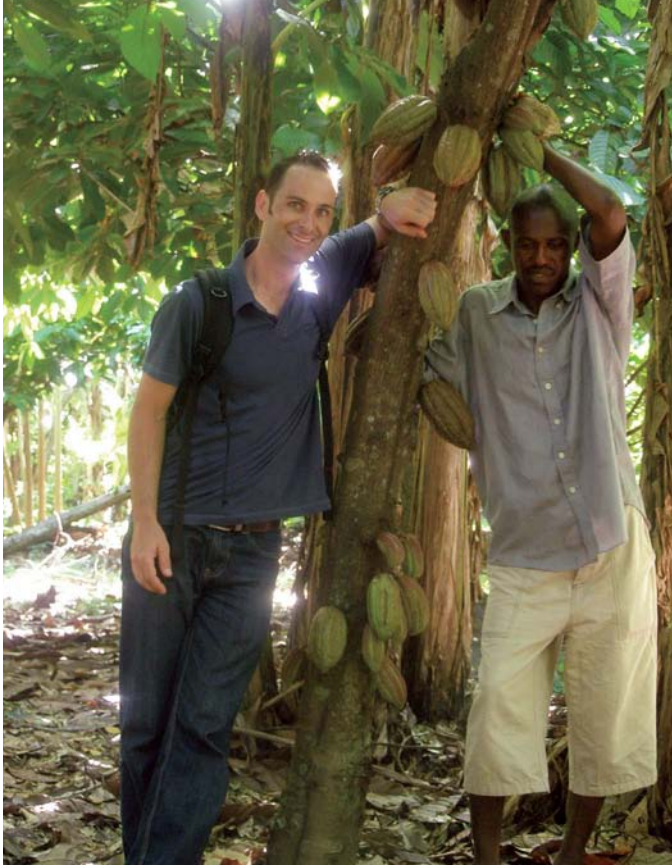
The business model behind Madécasse puts the entire chocolate production cycle in the hands of the Malagasy. Approximately 40 farmers work with the cooperative, which provides technical assistance, equipment and bookkeeping services. Once the beans are plucked from the trees, farmers are able to dry and prep the beans for production in the community without enlisting the services of a middleman or being paid just slightly above market price for them (which is generally the case with fair trade products). From there, the beans are sent to a chocolatier in Antananarivo, Madagascar's capital city, who creates the finished product. Factory workers in Madagascar are tasked with wrapping, packaging and tying the ribbon on the top of the bars. Only then are the finished chocolate products sent to the United States for marketing, sales and distribution.

Two team members on the ground in Madagascar oversee the entire operation to ensure the process works smoothly and the social impact of the company is a positive one. "The reason why the entire process is done in country is because we feel that creates more value," Salvatore says. "That is real sustainable development. You can't run a development program from thousands of miles away. You have to be in a partnership locally. We're involved in the entire process, but in the U.S., we're only focused on sales and distribution."



Cacao pods.

Left: The founders, Tim McCollum and Brett Beach.



Madécasse



Madécasse

Tim discusses production with farmers.

Brett inspects cocoa trees with a farmer.

U.S.-based Madécasse team members make it a point to each travel to Madagascar for at least one month out of each year to visit with members of the cooperative and make sure the product meets sustainability standards. The company focuses on quality over quantity and therefore educates and encourages farmers to diversify their crops, reuse organic

by-products and preserve the soil. Farmers are paid directly for certain crops, and because Madécasse works with each farmer individually, the company can help each member of the cooperative address specific issues regarding land, crop and equipment needs. In addition, it rewards particularly high quality products (a direct result of higher quality work) with bonuses because those specific beans make a higher quality chocolate. Keeping the entire chocolate-making process in Madagascar and allowing everyone to share in the profits of the company so that there is actual economic growth in the community is what adds real value to the product.

Despite the innovative vision of Madécasse, it's not an easy company to manage. With thousands of miles between the production team in Madagascar and McCollum, Beach and Salvatore (two of whom live in Brooklyn, New York, and one of whom is based in Oakland, California), logistics and communication are difficult. Even though they speak the local language, Salvatore says actually getting in touch with the farmers is a challenge. The bureaucracy involved with exporting and importing products isn't easy either, though it does help that the bars are completely produced when they leave Madagascar. One of the biggest challenges, however, is that Madécasse is not willing to compromise quality or sustainability to meet market demands. "The U.S. market is quick to respond, and they want results quickly, but we have a different business philosophy," Salvatore says. Companies based in the United States can turn new products out in a couple weeks, but because chocolate bars are being made on the ground in Madagascar, it can take months to introduce a new Madécasse product.



Madécasse

Loading cocoa.



Madécasse

Sun drying beans.

The company currently offers nine chocolate bars, which vary in cocoa content. Three specialty bars—sea salt and nibs, pink pepper and citrus, and exotic pepper—are also available in stores across the United States and online. A new partnership with the National Peace Corps Association supports alumni outreach and gives back to the Peace Corps community that spurred the creation of Madécasse in the first place. Popularity of the chocolate product and the growth of Madécasse indicate only positive things are on the horizon. “We want to showcase what Africa is capable of,” Salvatore says. “We want to grow as big as possible, but not at the expense of our farmers and not at the expense of our product.”

JoAnna Haugen (Kenya 04-05) is the community news editor for the National Peace Corps Association.



Madécasse

Packaged chocolate.

THE PEACE CORPS COMMUNITY MAKING A DIFFERENCE

by JoAnna Haugen

PROVIDING CLEAN WATER IN THE PHILIPPINES

In 2006, **Kevin Lee** (Philippines) joined Gemma Bulos in her mission to make sure people have access to clean water through the organization she founded in 2004 called A Single Drop. The demand for clean water was so great in the Philippines that ASD's Philippines office, A Single Drop for SafeWater, was opened shortly after Lee came on board. In less than four years, the organization provided more than 120,000 people with improved access to clean water and sanitation. Lee (who is now ASDSW's executive director) and Bulos were awarded with an Echoing Green Fellowship in 2007. www.singleddrop.org

ESTABLISHING QUALITY EMERGENCY HEALTH CARE IN UGANDA

Dr. Stacey Chamberlain (Senegal) is one of the founding members of the non-profit organization, Global Emergency Care Collaborative (GECC), which has developed an emergency room and training program for nurses in Uganda. Incorporated in 2008, GECC identifies areas in the world that do not have access to quality emergency care then partners with existing hospitals and trains nurses to provide this needed care. The first partnership site was at Nyakibale Hospital in Uganda, and the organization hopes to expand to other hospitals in Uganda and other developing countries. www.globalemergencycare.org

HELPING STUDENTS IN THE FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

The HABELLE Outer Island Education Fund, a non-profit organization established in 2006 by a **group of former Peace Corps volunteers**, offers scholarships and tuition-assistance grants to children living in the “low” or “outer” islands so they can attend independent schools in the larger district centers. Assistance is also provided in the way of book donations, material support and native language curriculum development. In 2010, the organization provided tuition scholarships to 21 students attending non-public elementary and high schools in the Federated States of Micronesia. www.habelle.org

DELIVERING TECHNOLOGY IN GUATEMALA

Don Livingston (Guatemala 67-70) is the brainchild behind Computers for Hope, an organization that provides computers to schools in Guatemala. Since starting the organization in 2005, he has delivered more than 1,000 computers, each of which is used by approximately 15 kids. Computers for Hope originally donated the computers but now charges for them, and the proceeds go toward building a new high school. www.computersforhope.com