

Indonesian and Filipino Farmers Boost Cocoa Crops

Cocoa farmers in Indonesia and the Philippines are working in alliance with international chocolate manufacturers to keep pests in check with fewer chemicals. They are adopting such modern cultivation methods as frequent pruning of infested branches and fertilizing to strengthen plants.

The Bureau for Asia and the Near East and the Indonesia mission are investing \$4.5 million and industry is adding \$30 million over three years to educate farmers in remote areas about new production practices and connect them to buyers.

Through these practices, farmers are getting higher yields and improved quality. In turn, chocolate producers such as Masterfoods (formerly Mars) have promised to buy their high-quality cocoa through buyers' contracts that allow the growers to reap the rewards of their hard work.

Some 90 percent of the world's cocoa is produced on small family farms. One reason cocoa is no longer a plantation crop is its vulnerability to pests. Growers have tended to rely on costly pesticides, which can also be harmful to the person who applies them.

The cocoa industry in Indonesia dates back to the country's days as a Dutch colony. The Dutch cocoa plantations were chewed up by the tiny cocoa pod borer, a moth larva that feeds on the inside of cocoa beans. At the time, cocoa trees were cut down to fight the infestation. But by the 1990s, the Indonesian cocoa industry was once more battling the borer.

At about the same time, agricultural researchers in the tropics, funded by the cocoa industry and the U.S. government, applied the lessons of "integrated pest

management"—or using nonchemical methods for keeping pests in check.

Farmers are encouraged to harvest cocoa beans frequently to reduce damage. They must prune frequently so that light between the branches drives away borer moths. They should bury or destroy pod husks after harvesting, in case moth larvae are inside. And they need to apply fertilizer to improve the health of the cocoa trees and strengthen their ability to fight off pests.

In Indonesia, more than 700 agricultural extension workers and 35,000 farmers have learned about integrated pest management. Many participated in an earlier program funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The new public-private alliance is expected to double the number of farmers skilled in nonchemical methods.

Farmers—some of whom thought they were dealing with a disease rather than an insect—report using fewer chemicals and harvesting bigger, heavier pods. When they were relying on pesticides, Indonesian farmers reported crop losses of as high as 40 percent. After adopting integrated pest management, losses typically dropped to a more manageable 15 percent.

Cocoa prices are at a 20-year high and high-quality beans can be hard to find. The partnership is therefore linking exporters to trained farmers who are seeking a premium for their cocoa beans.

Cocoa is not widely cultivated in the Philippines, so USAID/Manila, the cocoa industry, and the Philippine government are investing in establishing nurseries and developing seed stock.

There is a large domestic market for cocoa in the Philippines, which currently imports most of its supply. ★



A Sulawesi agricultural extension agent trained by ACDI/VOCA tells farmers how to care for cocoa trees to keep the cocoa pod borer in check. The extension agents work intensively with a group of farmers over several months. They, in turn, train other farmers.