

La Lengüeta

Empower the Arhuaco people to preserve their ancestral lands and cacao in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia



ORIGINAL BEANS

TASTE THE EARTH'S RAREST PLACES AND PRESERVE THEM



La Lengüeta

How it started

In 2013, colleagues at the US development organisation TechnoServe invited Original Beans to participate in a national study of Colombia's fine cacaos. This is how we met Carlos Castrillon of Cacao de Colombia, a craft cacao startup company based up north. Carlos and his colleagues are among the best local cacao and chocolate makers we know. So we are honoured to become exclusive partners in the work to protect the heritage of La Lengüeta, a green turtle nesting site at the Caribbean coast that stands as symbol for the Arhuaco tribal culture and its cacaos in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta.

The bean: the original La Lengüeta

Forced into the highlands for centuries by conquistadors, settlers and the coca wars, the Arhuaco tribe has recently returned to their sacred sites at the Caribbean coast. On the same land where coca and marijuana fueled the violence of the drug war not long ago, cacao is now the symbol of peace for the Arhuaco and their neighbours. However, of the little cacao that has survived the passing of times on their ancestral land, the harvest volumes are modest.

Among the native cacaos are several unique varieties, such as La Lengüeta with its exceptionally sweet, harmonious notes. Some cacao genetic scientists believe that the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta could have been the birthplace of the ancient criollo blanco, from where it dispersed south into the Amazon and further north to the Maya forests. The original beans of the Sierra Nevada are threatened by the boom in modern hybrid cocoa in the region, where a homogenous selection of non-Colombian cocoa hybrids has been selected to replace the great diversity of native cacaos. The Arhuaco farmers are determined to preserve the ancient cacaos, since they fit perfectly with their traditional philosophy and lifestyle based on organic and forest-friendly farming.

While living in the highlands, the Arhuaco grew cacao under challenging conditions in the roughest of terroirs. It took them days to



bring their cacao to towns in the lowlands, where they sold it below world market prices to the local middlemen. By trading directly with Original Beans, the local cacao prices and incomes have substantially increased with 58%.

The origin: Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia

La Lengüeta is another of the original beans that plays hard to get. Jan from our Bean Team travels eight rough hours on motorcycle over winding dirt roads, traversing gushing rivers, and hiking into the mountain forest to get to the cacao growers. When Jan was invited by the Arhuaco elders in 2015 to meet (under a giant sacred tree), he explained our mission and the tremendous efforts we put into making forest-friendly and climate-positive products from rainforest hotspots across the world. When he unfolded our chocolate wrapper to show the garden-compostable, wood-cellulose foil, one elder, Mamo Kamilo, interrupted: "If this is true, you really got it". The Arhuaco elder cut the wrapping and foil into small pieces and put it in the soil, whereafter he told Jan that he would hear from him in 3 months time: "If the foil is again soil, we can start working together".

Bean profile

Name: La Lengüeta

Origin: La Lengüeta, Caribbean coast of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Northern Colombia

Varietal: Long-forgotten landraces, including the acutely rare *Bunsi* cacao

Tasting notes: Warm depths and gentle flavours of sweet spices, lemongrass, licorice, and sesame.

Harvest: November–December

Rarity: Total harvest volumes below 16Mt annually

Terroir: Grows from coastal forest into the lower highlands, up to an altitude of 800 meters.

Fermentation & drying: At times it takes up to 10 hours on horseback for the Arhuaco to bring their cacao from the depths of the forest to their village. The wet cacao beans—in their sweet fruity pulp—are bought in the villages by our local partner and brought to their state of the art fermentation and drying facility. Here the cacao gently ferments, emitting sweet sour aromas for 5 to 7 days in wooden boxes, depending on the season.

Cacao de Colombia's experts make an art of fermenting these beans gently to keep the volatile spicy notes intact.

Technical aspects:

Fermentation level: > 70%

Moisture: < 7%

Bean size: 96g / 100 beans

Quality: Quality is evaluated and flavours are validated for all shipments to assure that they comply with Original Beans standards.

Certifications: Organically grown, but uncertified

Traceability: Full

Cacao and community project

With ecosystems ranging from coral reefs to rainforests to snow-clad mountains, the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta provides a habitat for an outstanding biodiversity. 7 endemic hummingbird species and 44 endangered animal species are found here—some of which are found nowhere else on Earth. This is the last place on Earth where the critically endangered Cotton-top Tamarin and the Sapphire-Bellied Hummingbird are found. The shore of La Lengüeta is a crucial nesting site for the endangered green turtle. 35 river basins emerge from the mountains, running into more than 700 rivers and gulches that provide clean water to millions of people in the lowlands. Sadly, land grabbing, deforestation, illegal mining, slash-&-burn agriculture and hydroelectric dams continue to pose a threat to the area's wildlife and water sources.

Protecting their land remains a struggle for the Arhuaco. They have recently formed a political movement to protect their land and its forests, through which they have launched an ambitious master plan. With this plan, the Arhuaco intend to protect and replenish the

natural resources of their ancestral land: they will let nature rule on 70% of the land, while they wish to grow sustainable cacao, coffee and subsistence crops on the remaining land. The Arhuaco have always been subsistence farmers, but cacao will play a different role for their community, since they plan to invest their income from cacao in strengthening their well-being and autonomy as a tribe.

What the project does

- Mapping of genetically strong and flavorful cacao trees
- Establishment of nurseries to raise genetically unique and strong cacao varieties and native wood species
- Establishment of cacao forests that function as in-situ cacao clonal gardens. Training in fermentation and drying, organic farming, and pest & disease control tactics
- Establishment of a demonstration farm for the high school in Bunkwimake, where 150 children go to high school, and training courses for the teachers

1

fermentation and
drying center
established

4

indigenous
communities
supported

81

cacao growers trained
in forest-friendly and
high-quality cacao
production

2

nurseries
established

100%

Climate-positive
supply chain

160

ha of old-grown cacao
forest preserved and
under sustainable
management

10k

ha of rainforest
indirectly safeguarded
by supporting forest-
friendly cacao



To learn, view and hear more visit our

[Photo Gallery](#) and [Project and Impact Tracker](#) pages

Please reach out to us if you would like to taste a cacao—or chocolate—sample or if you want to hear more about the bean, region, growers, and supply chain. We would love to tell you more and explore how we can unite our efforts to make the world better with chocolate.

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