



COMACO
Community Markets for Conservation



Going Green

For a long time we have wanted to create a special market for customers to purchase our *It's Wild!* products at affordable prices, helping low-income consumers enjoy the taste and the benefits of our nutritious products. We have finally done just that by opening our own stores called Green Market Shops. On April 9th, COMACO launched six new shops across Eastern Province where customers can purchase any of our 17 *It's Wild!* products. We have also launched a special way of purchasing our peanut butter, Yummy Soy, and rice with customers' own packaging, called *Yopima!*, and save almost 25% off the retail price while helping Zambia reduce its plastic waste problem.

To celebrate the launch of these shops we held a large event at our new Green Market Shop in Katete. We held promotions on certain products, raffles, taste testing of our Yummy Soy, and had special entertainment from a local drama group in the area. Honorable guests that attended were the District Commissioner of Katete, Chieftainess Kawaza and COMACO CEO, Dale Lewis. The event was broadcasted live on Facebook and was featured in the evening news and most all of the local newspapers.

We hope these markets will reach over 1 million consumers with not only a better source of nutrition, but an appreciation of the farmers who are now adopting farming practices that help add more nutrients to the crops that we turn into healthier products.



Left to right: COMACO CEO, Chieftainess Kawaza, DC of Katete

In this issue...



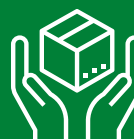
6 Green Market Shops open



Village chicken breeding facility helps needy



Protection of crops and elephants



17 *It's Wild!* Products



Coops convene AGMs to advance COMACO vision

Combating COVID-19 Impact with Poultry!



COVID-19 has impacted every single person around the world. We saw this impact among the families in Mfuwe, which is a wildlife tourism hot spot supported by Zambia's South Luangwa National Park. However, when COVID-19 hit, tourism came to a halt and many lodges were forced to close and lay-off their employees. Hundreds were local residents who had to return to their villages without the skills and the means to support their families. There was concern that many would be forced to take up poaching as a source of food and income to support their families. We asked ourselves what COMACO could do to support these families in a sustainable way.

With the help of our partners, *Elephant Cooperation*, we established a village chicken breeding facility to give out five free birds to individual needy families to start a small enterprise of raising chickens. Our aim was to target those families who had been most impacted by the lodges closing.

On April 7th, 40 residents from the surrounding area gathered at the COMACO Farmer Support Center in Mfuwe to receive their starting chickens. We distributed 200 chickens in total on that day and this will be repeated every other month as our breeding facility maintains production.

We were fortunate enough to have the District Commissioner, Area Game Warden, and a representative from the Department of Agriculture present. Each one offering their support to the program.

The vision behind this initiative is that those who have received chickens will use them to raise extra income, improve nutrition and to help educate their neighbors on raising poultry.



Charcoal Challenges Being Met in Mumbwa

A charcoal checkpoint was recently established at Kapyanga, 35KM from Mumbwa town. It has given us great experience in the challenges of controlling illegal charcoal. This past month Traditional Leaders, COMACO staff, and key government officials gathered to discuss the issue of charcoal licensing and its trafficking. An important resolution made to stop future issuances of any charcoal license until an assessment is undertaken of current weaknesses and ways to overcome them. This meeting also gave the opportunity to hear from the Senior Chief Shakumbila and his fellow Royal Highnesses on how they can use their authority to control illegal charcoal-making in Mumbwa District.



From Poacher to Protector



In 2003 when COMACO started its operations in Luangwa Valley, its mission was to help wildlife poachers learn new skills that would offer their families better ways of fulfilling their livelihood needs than by killing wild animals. In return, we asked them to surrender their guns and sign a pledge never to return to poaching again. Since then, we have transformed over 1,760 poachers.

With this reduction of poachers in Luangwa Valley, local farmers are experiencing an increase in wildlife and a growing frequency of damage to their crops, especially from elephants.. We proposed a solution called chili blasting. Chili blasting is just that! Using the same muzzle-loading guns once used for poaching, and under the watchful eye of a Department of National Parks and Wildlife scout, chili is rammed down the barrel with gun powder and fired at elephants approaching crops. The blast of chili powder leaves a cloud of hot chili in the air that elephants cannot breathe and they quickly run away without being harmed. Those who do the chili blasting are transformed poachers.

At the beginning, some believed it was a mistake to put guns back in the hands of those who once used them to poach. However, after even a short interaction with these transformed poachers, one will quickly learn that they do not want to go back to their old way of life. Sitting down with Julius Ng'uni, the treasurer of the Transformed Poachers Association of Zambia, he explained, "I take pride that I am now a blaster and I am helping my community to live with wildlife. People call us to protect their crops, and look to us for help. My life now is different than before. My family is safer. With the skills I've learned, we have with more food and income from what I can grow."

Our team had a chance to spend a week in Luangwa Valley, in Chitingulu Chiefdom, learning about the chili blasting process and observing first hand the impact that blasting is having in this farming community. Judy Zulu, one of the farmers who called the blasters to help protect her crops was happy to share her experience with blasters in her community. "We are so thankful for the blasters. It is because of them that our crops are safe. We don't have much here, we rely on our crops for everything. When the elephants destroy them it greatly affects us. The blasters are making a difference and we want them to continue."

It is not just first hand accounts from farmers that prove this program to be effective, but statistics as well. In Chikwa chiefdom in the 2019/2020 season chili blasting did not exist. In that year alone 11 people were killed by elephants, and 5 elephants were killed as well to control them. We are proud to say that in this 2020/2021 season no humans or wildlife have lost their lives.

These chili blasters are working every day and doing a dangerous job to protect the lives and crops of people living in their communities. They are in need of more supplies and materials such as protective clothing, transportation, boots, and flashlights, to name a few.

[If you are interested in helping this association or any other COMACO activity please follow this link](#)



Finding Funds for a Conservation Solution

This harvest season we are expecting to purchase over 2,000 tons of soybeans to promote its role in replenishing nutrients in the soils together with agroforestry. From this crop we then turn it into soy pieces, which is a meat substitute, high in protein and looks like meat. We started producing this product in 2020, but an issue has arisen in our production plant. Unfortunately, the processing equipment requires “solvent extracted” soy, which is the by-product from oil presses that use chemical extraction. If we use the raw soybeans from our farmers, the equipment becomes gummed up. The result is we cannot manufacture soy pieces from what our own farmers produce – which defeats the whole purpose!

We have identified a solution to this problem through a company in the USA called Instapro. It requires an “extruder” and a “pulverizer” that will allow us to use soybeans from our own farmers, as opposed to the commercially available chemical-extracted soy. Fortunately, we can use the equipment we have already purchased, but without the two added pieces of equipment we are stuck, and we risk failing our farmers and the environmental impact we are striving for. We recently made a down payment of \$73,000 to the company to get the purchase moving. However, we are now trying to raise an additional \$81,000 to pay the rest of the bill.

We have created a crowdsourcing fund to help raise the remaining balance. By turning these soybeans into a value-added product for sale across Zambia, we are able to offer more farmers the incentives to adopt the conservation practices we promote, while offering farmer a price for soybeans 5-10% above the prevailing price. This additional income benefits the small farmers directly and helps incentivize farming practices that lead to healthier soils, less need to cut tree in forests, and less wildlife poaching.

If you are interested in helping us purchase the equipment and continue to help better the lives of over 200,000 small scale farmers in Zambia please click the donate button below.



DONATE



What COMACO has Become

COMACO has become a frontline laboratory for researching conservation solutions for landscapes and biodiversity in Zambia. Its team of cross-cutting specialists provides a constant check on assumptions and insights for making innovations and strategies more likely to succeed. Verification of results is an on-going process, so lessons and practices can be refined and repeated with a high expectation of desired outcomes. The knowledge and insights COMACO is gaining is a shared experience between the farmers and local leaders we support and the team of practitioners and researchers who advance the learning process by watching how markets, technologies, and humanity interact to make conservation work. When results are substantiated, we're not shy to report and share with the broader audience of stakeholders and policy makers.

In recent years, we've seen COMACO evolve as if it were a public company that welcomes partnerships to gain from the expertise of others. It has become a platform for other fields of expertise to test COMACO's robustness to impact better and deeper. This is much welcomed, as it has taught us what a model like COMACO could mean for Zambia and its environment. Is it replicable and can it address multiple problems in a cost-effective way that gives investors a better return than other models? Such questions are especially relevant now as COMACO begins to test its efficacy along the boundary of the Kafue National Park and far removed from its core area of operations across the Luangwa Valley.

Those of us who work for COMACO know the stakes are high and it does seem like we're in a race against time as the Earth warms and Nature's losses compound by the day. We cannot afford to second-guess the complexities of conservation's challenges. Data is our currency for guiding action. COMACO excites us and keeps us pushing hard. We hope it excites you too as we learn together.

Annual General Meetings: Cooperative Leaders Plan for Markets that Conserve



AGM Topics

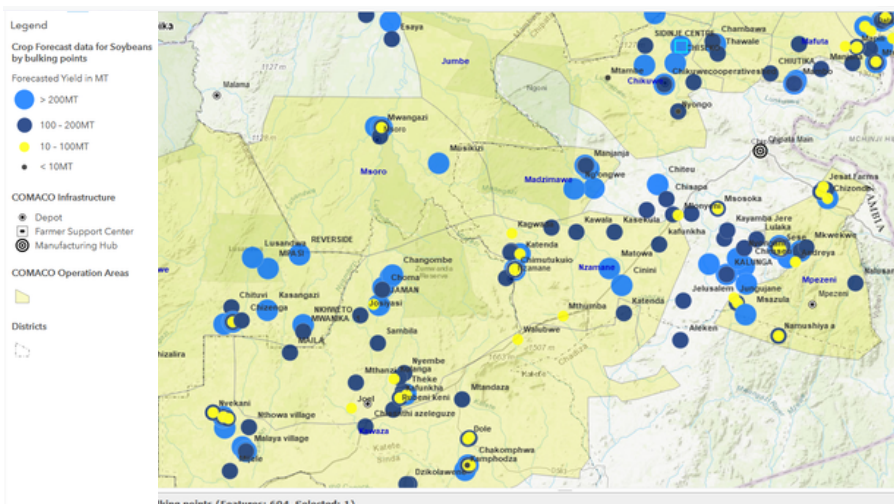
- Cooperative leadership
- Lessons learned from previous season
- Conservation compliance scores and dividend awards
- Business development and resource mobilization
- Emerging markets in organic certification
- Carbon market opportunities
- Addressing environmental threats

COMACO and the 81 farmer cooperatives it supports undertook 7 Annual General Meetings to review progress in developing their farmer organizations as self-financing farmer support institutions committed to farmer welfare and conservation.

Cooperative leaders traveled from their rural communities to reach meeting venues in town centers where IT-based communication allowed COMACO senior staff to engage from different geographic points. The use of this technology demonstrated how COMACO is able to maintain good coordination and teamwork as cooperatives expand in numbers, while allowing cooperatives to assert greater leadership and influence for their role in building COMACO markets. The Annual General Meetings set a powerful platform of resolutions for 2021: reduce deforestation and fires, achieve 100% compliance of sustainable, eco-agro-cultural practices, continue the expansion of agroforestry and crop rotation with legumes to restore soils, certify more farmers as organic, encourage chiefs to control land use disturbances, attain the necessary leadership standards to achieve financial sustainability for the farmer services that cooperatives are expected to provide. The power of these cooperatives will certainly be tested this year.

COMACO Supply Chain Goes Digital and Rewards Conservation Compliance

Our target for buying crops this year for turning into *It's Wild!* products is 11,000 tons, all sourced from small-scale farmers residing across a vast rural landscape. To meet this tonnage, the largest ever for COMACO, a new system for directing trucks where to buy and collect crops is now in use. Much of this information is tied to data updated by cooperatives on a daily basis through SMS transmissions by their lead farmers. The map viewed here illustrates how this information can be queried and used by the COMACO crop-buying team to make crop collections and payments to farmers as cost-effective as possible.



The above map is a representation of our real time live data collection for crop purchasing

Such cost-savings allow COMACO to pay farmers above top prevailing market prices. When cooperatives demonstrate a high commitment to conservation practices as scored by annual compliance audits, the company pays its members a significantly higher premium price for their commodities. This difference in price serves as a motivation to strive for better scores the following years.