



COMACO
Community Markets for Conservation



The COMACO “Store” is Not What You Think!

At COMACO, we’re redefining what a food store is. Yes, you will find our products in the stores where you shop, but the real store for us is deep in the rural landscape. It is here you find the farming practices that you support when buying *It’s Wild!* No longer using chemicals that can take the life out of soils and deprive crops of the critical minerals we need to stay healthy, our farmers farm differently and sustainably. They are restoring soils with organic practices, allowing soils to build up the living organisms that feed the crops and allow nutrients deep in the soil to cycle through the soil by growing special trees alongside crops. This is the story often overlooked and not easily seen when you reach for an *It’s Wild!* product. The farmer is somehow forgotten, and COMACO wants to change this.

COMACO is leading a revolution in Zambia, a “brown” revolution, by improving soils with markets that drive the process. It is also a cultural transformation by small-scale farmers resulting in some wonderful benefits for Zambia.

By keeping soils healthy, farmers can remain sedentary and the rate of land clearing or deforestation slows down and biodiversity returns. Farmers are able to save money by not relying on expensive chemical inputs. They also achieve higher yields to secure increased food security and income. Parents can send their children to school and rates of early pregnancy drops. With more food and income, the need to make charcoal or poach wildlife declines.

All of this takes time, though, and perhaps that is the frustrating part. The many years of past mistakes for the way farmers were taught to farm will not change overnight. Although change is happening. Slowly, streams are flowing again, farmers face less risk from climate change, and Zambia’s fragile environment may have a safer future.

So, the next time you reach for an *It’s Wild!* product, think about where our real “store” is and continue supporting those farmers out there with your next purchase. Together, we can change the world!

Dale Lewis, CEO

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Conservation Pledge - Joining COMACO

COMACO is a supply chain organization in Zambia that promotes sustainable, climate smart agricultural practices amongst small scale farmers with the intention of improving their livelihoods while conserving the natural resources and wildlife they live with. To date we currently work with over 225,000 farmers across Luangwa Valley and around the Kafue National Park. For a farmer to be apart of the COMACO family they are required to sign a conservation pledge, agreeing to abide by the conservation practices we promote. Such practices include, planting of Gliricidia trees, crop diversification, minimum tillage, no charcoal production, and no poaching. By signing the agreement farmers will be eligible for their crops to be purchased at premium prices, depending on how well they comply.



Sustainable, Eco-agricultural Farming



Farmers who are part of COMACO plant their crops using sustainable, eco-agricultural practices. All farmers plant Gliricidia trees. By adopting the use of Gliricidia in their fields, farmers no longer need to use fertilizer, meaning the crops they produce are more natural and they save money not having to purchase the fertilizer. Farmers will use the leaves from the trees to create compost fertilizer. Because it is a natural insect repellent, the trees ward off army worms, grain borers and other pests. Putting the leaves in granaries protect families' food storage. COMACO is working with ECOCERT to certify our farmers as organic so we can return more value back to farmers as we begin to produce organic, more premium-valued food products.

Harvesting

Small-scale farmers in Zambia rely on their harvest to feed family members for the entire year. If there is a poor harvest the family suffers and will resort to measures that are harmful to themselves or their environment. Through the farming practices COMACO has introduced, farmers are seeing the positive impact that climate smart agriculture can bring, like much improved crop yields and self-reliance on producing their own fertilizer from the benefits of Gliricidia trees.

Joyce Kamanga gives her first hand account on the impact natural farming has done for her family "My crops have grown so big it's incredible. Within the second year I planted fields with Gliricidia and others without, I could see a drastic difference in the size of the maize cobs as well as the quantity my fields were producing with Gliricidia. Now I can produce enough to support my family with food and money."



Crop Purchase

COMACO cooperatives play a large role in the process of purchasing crops, including groundnuts, soy beans, rice, cowpeas and honey. In order to make this process run smoothly we have developed bulking points across the farming landscapes where farmers deliver their crops. As cooperatives aggregate crops together with their members, COMACO cashiers arrive with a truck to pay farmers on the spot for their crops and at premium prices to promote the continued adoption of conservation practices. This year alone we are expected to purchase 11,000 tons of crops from the farmers we work with. We have set aside 75,000,000 Kwacha to purchase crops and anticipate buying from over 50,000 farmers.



Storing Crops and Traceability



At COMACO we have developed a system that allows us to track which farmers have produced the crops and the location where the crop was produced. Once crops are sold at bulking points they are transferred to our storage facilities. Each bag of grain is labeled with a number specific to that bulking point. The information is input into our online system that records the date the bag arrived, the truck it came on, and which bulking point it came from. When it arrives a sample will then be taken from the batch and tested for grain quality, including such measures as moisture, aflatoxins, and the amount of foreign material in the bag.

A Brand Created Just for You

COMACO has multiple processing lines for producing 17 value-added chemical-free food products at 5 different processing plants. Our more popular products, all sold under the brand *It's Wild!*, are peanut butter, honey, rice, and Yummy Soy. Soon we'll be launching cowpea snacks and soy pieces to add to the nutritional needs of our customers.

Our products are sourced straight from the fields of our farmers, made from the highest quality, all-natural ingredients, and without any hidden additives or chemicals.



It's Wild! Available Across Zambia

COMACO is an organization that is for everyone, helping both farmers and consumers stay healthy while conserving. We can all play our part in this role that COMACO promotes by supporting our farmers with an *It's Wild!* product purchase. One way we do this is by selling our products in all major retail stores across Zambia. Consumers can also purchase our products in any of our recently opened Green Market Shops, designed specifically for low-income consumers who may not afford the higher prices at the retail chain stores. Within the past year we have opened 6 shops, making a total of 9 with 3 more to be opened in the future. We have also started exporting our products to the United States and South Africa.



The Circle of COMACO



Our business works as a solution for conservation while helping overcome the challenges of poverty that so many small-scale farmers face. It is a model we improve on each year, making our supply chains more cost-efficient, finding better-valued markets for our farmers, and incorporating new solutions and technologies with our partners.

The results all add up to healthier, more prosperous lives with new economic opportunities that flow from conservation. For example, cooperatives that excel in meeting conservation guidelines receive a cash reward called conservation dividends that help communities invest in boreholes, seed banks, and school renovations. As they progress, other benefits like carbon markets and organic certified markets add to their wealth.

A Story from the Field

Meet Methadio Banda, a resident of Kawaza Cheifdom in Sinda district. Methadio joined COMACO in 2016. "Before joining COMACO my life was hard. I could produce very little in my field because my soils were not fertile. I was not able to feed my family. Just look at my fields with Gliricidia. Now I am able to feed them. I have used the money that I have made from my crops to send all of my children to school. Three of them have completed grade 12 and the rest are in school. Not only that, but my family is able to eat 3 times a day. Before COMACO I would produce 1 ox cart of maize, 10 bags of soy beans, and no groundnuts. However, today, I have already harvested 85 bags of soy beans, maize is currently in the field and I am expected to harvest not less than 15 ox carts, For groundnuts I expect not less than 25 bags of unshelled ground nuts. COMACO has done great, I want to encourage fellow farmers to comply with what COMACO is teaching. "



It's Wild! in America



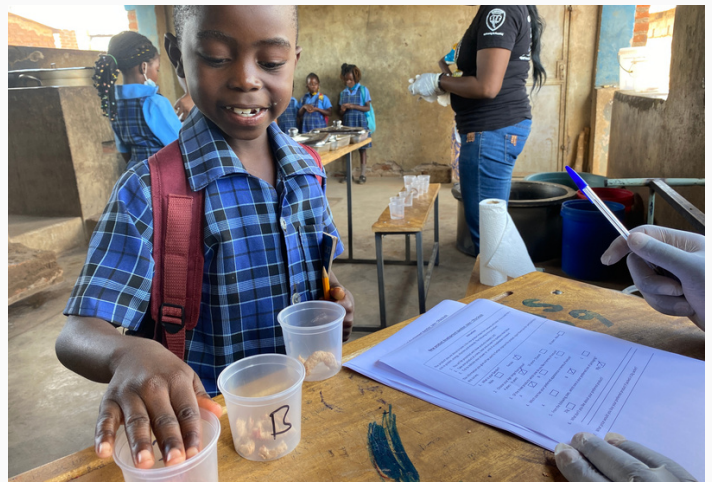
Touchdown USA!!

In our March issue we announced that our first container of *It's Wild!* products was exported to the United States. We are excited to announce that we have received confirmation from our partners, Sharing Our Best, in the United States that our shipment has finally arrived!

This has been a long process with many obstacles as we learned all the steps involved, but we are excited to see all of this hard work paying off. For all of our stateside followers, continue to watch our social media pages for information on how you can purchase our products.

Cowpea Snack Tasting

Over the past year our food team has been working hard to create a healthy snack food out of cow peas. We are reaching the final stages and the product will be out soon. This past month our staff carried out taste tests at grocery stores and local schools to help fine tune our product design. Participants in the study have supplied feedback on texture and flavor of the product. We are getting close to finalizing the product and can't wait to put it out on the market.



23% of the Way to Our Goal!



Last month we shared with you our efforts to raise funds to purchase additional equipment needed to manufacture soy pieces as a low-cost alternative to meat. We have raised \$18,850 out of our goal of \$81,000. The machine will help us to increase the scale of our market incentives for adopting conservation farming by incentivizing crop rotation with soybeans farmed with *Gliricidia* trees. This helps to maintain healthier soils, keep farmers sedentary, reduce the need to cut down forests and in some cases the need to poach wildlife. If you would like to help us reach our goal, please click the donate button below.

DONATE 