

# From bean to bar, Haiti's cocoa wants international recognition



Sorting of cocoa beans according to their size and appearance is done in the workshops of Makaya Chocolat in Petionville, Haiti. —AFP photos



Final packaging, ready for sale is seen in Makaya Chocolat's shop in Petionville, Haiti.



Ralph Leroy makes a last adjustment before Santa Claus can be put on sale.



Preparation of a chocolate mousse by chocolate maker Ralph Leroy in the workshops of Makaya Chocolat.

Although small in the face of South America's giants, Haiti is slowly developing its cocoa industry, earning better incomes for thousands of farmers and refuting the stereotype that culinary art is the preserve of wealthy countries. Haiti's annual production of 5,000 tons of cocoa pales in comparison to the 70,000 tons produced per year by neighboring Dominican Republic, but the sector's development is recent in the island nation. Feccano, a federation of cocoa cooperatives in northern Haiti, became the first group to organize exchanges in 2001 by prioritizing farmers' profits.

"Before, there was the systematic destruction of cocoa trees because the market price wasn't interesting for farmers who preferred very short-cycle crops," said Guito Gilot, Feccano's commercial director. The cooperative now works with more than 4,000 farmers in northern Haiti. By fermenting its members' beans before export, Feccano has been able to target the market for fine and aromatic cocoa. "Feccano's customers pay for quality: they don't have the New York Stock Exchange as a reference," said Gilot.

#### Just-in-time collection

Smelling potential, Haiti's private sector finally began investing in the cocoa industry, which until then had been supported solely by non-governmental organizations and humanitarian efforts. By setting up its fermentation setter in 2014 in Acul-du-Nord, 15 kilometers (nine miles) from Haiti's second city Cap-Haitien, the company Produit des îles (PISA) entered the market. But the logistical challenges are many. "The producers we work with farm less than a hectare, often divided into

several plots whereas, in Latin America, a small producer already owns four or five hectares," explained Aline Etlicher, who developed the industry at PISA.

"We buy fresh cocoa, the same day as the harvest so the farmer no longer has the problems of drying and storing that they would have if they sold it to an intermediary," said the French agronomist. In recent months, this just-in-time bean collection from all sites has been more challenging because many roads were regularly blocked due to socio-political unrest. Maintaining organic and fair trade certifications for the cocoa is delicate, but the Haitian style has made its mark abroad. "Today there are bars sold in the United States that are called Acul-du-Nord," Etlicher said proudly.

"With our customers, we are part of the 'bean to bar' movement of chocolate makers who transform the cocoa bean into the chocolate bar," she said, adding that by cutting out the middleman, Haitian producers' revenues have doubled. And on the other end of the chain, bean processing remains local.

#### 'Plant your cocoa'

For master chocolatier Ralph Leroy, making a rum ganache-Haitian, just like all the products he uses—was not an obvious choice. After years in Montreal, he returned home to Haiti as a haute-couture stylist. His shift to cocoa began when he made clothes out of chocolate for a culinary trade show. The training he then underwent for a year in Italy fueled his passion as much as his pride. "The first week, I think I was insulted when the professor said, 'Chocolate is made for Europe. You there, plant your cocoa, we buy the cocoa and do the work,'" he recalled. Today, Leroy runs the chocolate

company he founded in 2016, Makaya, and the edible sculptures that come out of his workshop are a huge sensation at parties. His company now has about 20 employees who share his passion.

"Even in cooking schools, we don't learn this. I learned everything here and I am very, very proud," said Duasmine Paul, 22, head of Makaya's laboratory. Echoes of car horns reach the ears of Makaya employees carefully sorting cocoa beans, a side effect of the chaotic traffic that paralyzes Haitian capital Port-au-Prince at the end of the year. From his workshop, where he also concocts chocolate-based cocktails, Leroy sees as sweet revenge the great marketing of his bars. "The greatest pleasure is when, before traveling, Haitians come here to buy a lot to offer abroad. It's become their pride. And also when Europeans come and buy all the stock... I tell myself that I am doing a good job," he says with a burst of laughter. —AFP



Preparation of hot chocolate drink is done in the workshops of Makaya Chocolat.



Sorting of cocoa beans according to their size and appearance is done in the workshops of Makaya Chocolat in Petionville, Haiti.



Preparation of a chocolate ganache with local rum by chocolate maker Ralph Leroy.



Ganache of espresso chocolate, prepared by chocolate maker Ralph Leroy in the workshops of Makaya Chocolat.



## Snowshoes are the new toilet paper as French banned from slopes

Demand for snowshoes has skyrocketed since the French government effectively banned downhill skiing in an attempt to contain Covid-19, the world's biggest manufacturer of snowshoes reported on Thursday. TSL Sport Equipment, based in the Alpine city of Annecy, said it was selling double the usual number of snowshoes this winter, with demand on some days spiking to 10 times the seasonal normal. Snowshoes allow walkers to navigate snowy terrain much more easily than normal shoes, allowing holiday makers in winter sport resorts to venture into mountainous terrain for long hikes. The French government has ordered ski lifts closed until January, fearing that queues of skiers would promote the spreading of coronavirus, but allowed resorts to open—albeit with restaurants and cafes shut like everywhere in France. "We're seeing a similar phenomenon to toilet paper purchases in shops," said Philippe Gally, the company's owner for 34 years, in reference to empty shelves in supermarkets during a lockdown in the spring when people hoarded toilet paper for fear of running out.

He said daily orders had doubled to around 2,000 pairs of snowshoes, with

peaks of 10,000 orders on some days since President Emmanuel Macron ordered lifts shut on November 24 as part of a range of anti-virus measures. Gally said snowshoe walking had already become the second most-loved winter sport in France after downhill skiing, but had taken the crown this season. "People want to enjoy the mountains, but they can't ski, so they go out with snowshoes," Gally said. TSL has doubled its staff to 100 this season to meet demand, many of whom are seasonal workers and ski coaches who need work while they wait for lifts to reopen. Nevertheless, the order backlog is currently around 45,000 shoes, Gally said. In total, TSL expects to sell 200,000 snowshoes this year, translating into revenues of around 10 million euros (\$12 million). When announcing the ski lift ban, Macron warned that coronavirus risks made it "impossible" to allow winter sports to resume quickly, adding he hoped that restrictions could be lifted in January. France's 350 ski resorts have been up in arms over the decision, saying the weeks around Christmas and New Year are crucial for their survival as they account for up to a quarter of their annual revenues. —AFP

## GoDaddy apologises for fake Christmas bonus email security test

US web company GoDaddy apologized Thursday after an email that promised employees a Christmas bonus in the midst of the economic crisis turned out to be a computer security test. "GoDaddy takes the security of our platform extremely seriously. We understand some employees were upset by the phishing attempt and felt it was insensitive, for which we have apologized," a spokesman for GoDaddy, the largest internet domain management company in the world, told AFP in a statement. "While the test mimicked real attempts in play today, we need to do better and be more sensitive to our employees," added the Arizona-based company.

In December, around 500 employees clicked on an email from the company offering a Christmas bonus of \$650 and asking them to fill out a form with their personal details. Two days later, a different message appeared in their inboxes. "You are receiving this email because you failed our recent phishing test," the email from GoDaddy's security chief read, according to Arizona's Copper Courier newspaper. The technique of phishing, widely used by computer hackers, sees emails pretending to be a person known to the intended target, with the objective of obtaining information to infiltrate their computer systems. The test email sparked uproar on social media as millions of Americans have been hit hard by the economic crisis linked to the coronavirus pandemic. —AFP



## Secret Santa delights Canadians with lavish gifts

A mystery anonymous Santa Claus sent gift cards worth Can\$250 with poems to several hundred residents of a neighborhood in western Canada, reports said Saturday. "Woke up to find this on my step with a very large gift card. It appears my whole neighborhood got one," Edmonton resident Leigh-Ann MacNaughton said on Facebook alongside a picture of a three-verse composition about hope and solidarity. "I have been crying all morning." Around 400 similar envelopes were dropped on December 24, and each contained a Can\$250 Walmart voucher, residents told local media. Elisha Tennant, who lost her job during the pandemic, also welled up when she opened one of the mystery packages. "It was just very

heartwarming and touching that someone would do that," she said Friday, according to CBC. "To have something like this, I mean, that's a month of groceries for us."

The poem offered soothing words about the possibility of a better year after months of hardship caused by the coronavirus pandemic and a mounting worldwide death toll. CBC reached out to an email listed at the bottom of the note, which was signed "Secret Santa." "I decided to do it because I know that lots of people have had a really tough year and I had the means to help out," the apparent benefactor replied. "I hope the gifts gave people a sense that the world is good and there is a brighter future not far ahead." —AFP

