The Pearl Endowment Fund Supports 'Goats to Gashonga'

The former MSU PEARL Project in Rwanda offers continued evidence of its success and sustainability in the specialty coffee marketplace as numbers of international roasters and importers deepen their partnerships with cooperatives throughout Rwanda to further raise awareness among consumers across the globe. A notable legacy of the Pearl program at MSU was the creation of the Pearl Endowment Fund in 2005. Inspired by the interest of specialty coffee roasters desiring a mechanism to directly support coffee communities in Rwanda, IIA formalized the creation of a fund to accept contributions from both companies and individuals. The Pearl Endowment Fund was broadly established to improve livelihoods among coffee farmers in coffee producing countries where MSU has applied its PEARL coffee development model. It was also designed to carefully identify needs among coffee communities. IIA works closely with donors to apply contributions to specific programs or interventions that offer sustainable improvements to the livelihoods of coffee farmers.

IIA Director Dan Clay and Paramount Coffee CEO Angelo Oricchio

Providing major impetus in launching the Pearl Endowment Fund was Paramount Coffee of Lansing. In 2005 Paramount partnered with MSU to sell and promote Rwanda coffee as part of the MSU sesquicentennial anniversary. In their commitment to MSU, Paramount agreed to donate $1 from the sale of each bag of Rwanda coffee to the Pearl Endowment Fund. Over the years the fund has grown in size, as has the magnitude of the contributions. Initially Paramount helped a cooperative from whom they bought their Fairtrade certified Rwanda coffee by paying the cooperative's annual certification fee to maintain their Fairtrade status. Another year Paramount contributions made it possible for Epiphanie Mukashyaka, a Rwandan coffee farmer, to travel to the annual SCAA Conference on behalf of the farmers of her Bucafe washing station that supplies coffee to many US roasters, including Paramount.

In 2009 Paramount Coffee requested that IIA confer with Gashonga Cooperative, their primary supplier of Rwanda coffee. Interested to hear from cooperative representatives the feedback from Gashonga farmers about specific community needs, Paramount hoped to make a targeted and substantive contribution to a broad swath of cooperative households. The Goats to Gashonga initiative was conceived to accomplish that goal. With Paramount's substantial 2008 donation, IIA was able to arrange for the purchase of 400 goats for distribution among the 1200 members of the Gashonga Cooperative. A ceremony was arranged on May 3, 2009 attended by Paramount Coffee CEO Angelo Oricchio and IIA Director Dan Clay. Together they addressed the Gashonga community and individually presented the goats to very appreciative coffee farmers.

For more information please contact Dr. Dan Clay,
email: clay@msu.edu

PEARL Then and Now

In the year 2000, the Institute for International Agriculture (IIA) at Michigan State University initiated the PEARL Project (Partnership for Enhancing Agriculture in Rwanda through Linkages), funded by USAID. The goal was to assist Rwandan rural communities and agricultural institutions to work together in rebuilding after the devastating war and genocide of 1994. PEARL sought to achieve this goal in a dramatic way, developing an economic engine for the Rwandan agricultural economy that would be successful and sustainable for Rwandan growers over the long term.

PEARL began by developing one growers' cooperative in 2001 with a membership of 250. After six years of intensive work, the PEARL Project has supported the launch of dozens of coffee cooperatives in Rwanda with an average membership of 2000 growers. Today, just three years later, there are over 115 coffee washing stations, both cooperatives and privately owned and Rwanda is now recognized worldwide for its exemplary coffees. PEARL also has helped cooperatives establish their own coffee federation, the only registered specialty coffee export and marketing company in Rwanda.

The economic impact of the PEARL Project is clearly evidenced among the specialty coffee farmers who now have increased access to education, healthcare and improvements in housing. The spirit of this program lives on in Rwanda today through the Pearl Endowment Fund.