



Food for Thought

June 2009

The Equilibrium Fund

Guatemala

We didn't appreciate this tree before, now we are going to protect it and plant more in the community. The kids like it (the lunches) and we can sell it for income.

-Mayor of La Canoa, Poptun, Guatemala



JUNE'S EDUCATIONAL THEME: FOOD SECURITY, RAINFOREST CONSERVATION AND EDUCATION

Our featured program deals with educating indigenous women about a previously neglected local resource, the Maya Nut, and through this effort increasing the awareness and importance of rainforest conservation among the rural population in Guatemala. Not realizing how they could benefit from the Maya Nut resource, Guatemalan Mayans were burning down Maya Nut trees in order to grow less healthy and sustaining crops, destroying the rainforest in the process and increasing carbon dioxide.

PROTECTING GUATEMALAN RAINFORESTS AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

The lack of economic resources for the indigenous rural population leads to the increased destruction of their habitat in order to grow crops like corn and soy. Forests cover 36.3% of Guatemalan land, 49.7% of this forest is primary forest cover or rainforest, the most biodiverse type of forest. Between 1990 and 2005, Guatemala lost 17.1% of its rainforest, around 810,000 hectares. Guatemala has some 1,246 known species of amphibians, birds, mammals and reptiles according to figures from the World Conservation Monitoring Centre. Of these species, 6.7% are endemic, meaning they exist in no other country.ⁱ

How does food insecurity and lack of education about natural resources contribute to the environmental crisis?

MAYAN WOMEN, EDUCATION AND THEIR ROLE IN SOCIETY

Mayan adults as a whole have less than half the level of schooling as their non-indigenous (Ladino) counterparts in Guatemala, 2.5 years versus 5.7 years.ⁱⁱ Mayan women are the most disadvantaged demographic group particularly because they have the lowest levels of education, lack of Spanish literacy in many cases and geographic and gender-related barriers that limit access to jobs.

Fast Facts

74.5% of the rural (Mayan) population live below the national poverty line, \$1.52 per person per day (2000).

39% of Mayan women aged 15 to 64 years old are literate vs. 68% of Mayan males.

By age **18**, almost **40%** of Mayan women are married.

Women make **31.3%** of the total work force

65% of the women who participate Maya Nut workshops have never attended a class or workshop

Fewer than 10% of extremely poor Mayan girls who entered primary school completed that level, with only 14% of these primary school graduates enrolling in secondary school. More than half of extremely poor Mayan girls start school late (past the compulsory age of seven). The most common reason for non-enrollment of girls was housework followed by lack of funds and the age of the child. In a study assessing the disadvantages of Mayan girls, many parents were reluctant to continue schooling for daughters beyond puberty because of the costs and the expectations that their daughters' future role was to be that of wife and mother, roles for which education was not deemed necessary. The stigma of unintended pregnancy was also a reason for keeping daughters at home.ⁱⁱ

How do the Mayan societal views towards females affect the educational and work opportunities of women and girls?

APPROPRIATE APPROACHES: SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTIONS

Mayans need to be able to provide a steady income for themselves and their families and to drastically reduce their food insecurity. As a primarily agricultural work force, finding a crop that does not destroy their habitat is essential. The ubiquitous Maya Nut that has been neglected for generations is one solution to the problem. Another appropriate intervention is to empower and support a disenfranchised female population. World studies have shown that when women are productive, equal members of society, economies tend to grow faster, poverty rates drop and the well-being of communities is enhanced.



The Equilibrium Fund Maya Nut Program provides a new paradigm of community based conservation which focuses on women as the caretakers of the family and the environment. By providing women with the skills they need to earn income and feed their children, they improve their lives and the lives of their families. EF trains rural women about the nutrition, processing, recipes and marketing of Maya Nut, this motivates them to conserve rainforest, plant trees and get organized to produce and market Maya Nut products so that they can earn income. Program participants also serve as educators and trainers for other rural communities and they are involved in all aspects of the Maya Nut program.

Women who have received training from The Equilibrium Fund have started Maya Nut based businesses, some of these businesses in Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Mexico and Guatemala are already producing finished products for local and international sales.

The Maya Nut program has demonstrated positive and lasting impacts on:

- Rainforest conservation
- Reforestation
- Health and nutrition
- Food security
- Women's incomes, self-esteem and status
- Maternal health and infant birth weights

Since 2003, EF has trained over 10,000 women from 700 communities about the Maya Nut for food and income.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- *What are some of the key components of the Equilibrium Fund model? How does each of these contribute to the program's success in helping to equip women with the skills and supports needed to lift themselves and their families out of extreme poverty?*
- *How did the video and/or reviewing the materials provided impact you personally?*

VOICES

When we came to La Bendicion, we suffered a lot because we didn't have any money to live and thanks to God, Erika came to visit us. She came to ask us if we knew about the Maya Nut, the Maya seed. Honestly, I didn't know about it because we ignored the seed.

-Odelia, program participant

Today, Odelia is packaging roasted Maya Nut flour to sell at local markets and educating other communities of women about the many uses of the Maya Nut.

By giving women the knowledge about the value of this seed, the women's self-esteem increases because not a lot of women participate or maybe their husbands won't let them participate. So this is what motivates us to go to communities, also the reforestation since they already cut down a ton of trees. To rescue those left, we still have to motivate the women that if there's a Maya Nut tree, they should fight to save it so it won't be cut down

-Maya Nut workshop participant



We didn't know what to do with it, now we have ideas. Now we are going to bring it to light.

-Maya Nut program participants

MEETING RESOURCES

WEBSITES

<http://www.theequilibriumfund.org/>

Film about the work of The Equilibrium Fund <http://www.seedsofinspirationmovie.com/>



BOOK CORNER

Non-Fiction:

Rigoberta Menchú Tum: Activist for Indigenous Rights in Guatemala

By Heather Lehr Wagner. 2007

Describes the life and work of Rigoberta Menchú Tum, a Mayan from Guatemala who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992.

Ancient Maya: Archaeology Unlocks the Secrets to the Maya's Past By Nathaniel Harris. 2008

The ancestral homeland of the Maya spans five centuries of history in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador. See how ancient sites and artifacts help scientists today piece together the puzzle of the Maya's past

The Road That Has No End: How We Traded Our Ordinary Lives for a Global Bicycle Touring Adventure By Tim Travis. 2004

Dare to live a dream! Tim and Cindie Travis accomplish the unthinkable, in an unprecedented worldwide cycling adventure. Their clever story explores the depths of humanity, as they expose themselves to life's perils on roads less traveled. This story is written as it happens, on the road. The result is salt-of-the-earth drama related on the fly through an internet journal, culminating in a series of captivating true stories. A chapter on Guatemala is included.

Juvenile Fiction:

The Honey Jar / Rigoberta Menchú with Dante Liano. 2006

The Honey Jar retells the ancient stories Rigoberta Menchú's grandparents told her when she was a little girl, and we can imagine her listening to them by the fire at night. These Maya tales include natural phenomena narratives and animal stories. The underworld, the sky, the sun and moon, plants, people, animals, gods, and demi-gods are all players in these vibrant stories.

SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS SHOPPING:

Education and More - women artisan-produced fair trade crafts - "Educating children and reducing poverty in Guatemala" Really beautiful table runners and scarves, jewelry.

<http://www.educationandmore.org/Arts%20and%20Crafts.html>



Lots of woven things - bags, shawls, baby stuff

<http://www.mayafairtrade.com/>

Guatemalan coffee

<http://www.nectaroflife.com/Guatemalahue.htm>



Maya Nut flour and beverage

<http://www.mayancafedemojo.com>

DINING WITH WOMEN RECIPES

Puerco en Salsa de Adobo (Pork in Adobado Sauce) adapted from an ebook titled "Beauty of Guatemalan Cuisine"

NOTE: This recipe requires advance preparation.



2 pounds tomatoes, halved	2 t. red chile powder
10 cloves garlic	salt and pepper
1 medium onion, sliced	1 t. ground cumin
	1/4 t. ground allspice
	1/2 t. oregano
	white vinegar
	6 pork chops or beef steaks

Preheat the broiler. Arrange the tomatoes, garlic and onion on baking sheet and broil 5 to 10 minutes, turning frequently, until the vegetables are softened and slightly charred around the edges. In a large bowl, combine the roasted vegetables with the rest of the ingredients, except the white vinegar. Working in batches, process the mixture in a food processor. Do not puree but pulse until the mixture resembles a thick, chunky sauce. Add the white vinegar to taste. Put the pork chops or beef steaks in a large, shallow dish and pour the sauce over them. Cover the dish with plastic and refrigerate overnight or up to three days, as they do in Guatemala. When ready to cook, preheat the grill to high heat. Remove the meat from the sauce, wiping away any chunk and grill.

Salsa Verde

Adapted from wuzzle.org. Sounds strong and hot but very mellow and tasted yummy with the pork recipe.

8 large tomatillos-chopped	1/2 cup white vinegar
3 cloves garlic-crushed	1/4 t. allspice
3 jalapeno- chopped (I seeded the peppers-not as hot)	1/2 t. oregano
	salt and pepper

Add tomatillos, garlic and peppers into a small saucepan. Cook until tomatillos have softened. Add remaining ingredients, simmer five minutes. Bottle and refrigerate.

Fritanga (Guatemalan Fried Rice)

Adapted from e-book titled "Beauty of Guatemalan Cuisine"

This delicious and very easy recipe is infinitely adaptable. You could do nearly any combination of meats and vegetables that you think would be good together, and/or add cumin or chili powder if you want to liven it up even more. Leave out the meat, reduce the rice and serve it as a side. Substitute beans for some of all of the meat. The quantities and ingredients are not written in stone at all so have some fun with it!!

Serves at least 6.

1 small onion, minced	2-3 plum tomatoes, diced
2-3 cloves garlic, minced	Jalapeno pepper, seeded and diced (optional)
2T olive oil	Salt and pepper to taste
¾ - 1lb beef, in 1-inch cubes (I used New York Strip)	
3 (or more) cups cooked rice	
1 small chayote, peeled, cored, cut into 1- inch cubes and steamed until just tender	

Heat oil in large skillet over medium low heat. Cook onion for about 5 minutes, then turn heat up to medium to medium high, add meat (and jalapeno, if using) and cook, stirring, for about another 4 minutes. Add garlic and rice and stir for 2 minutes. Reduce heat a little, add tomatoes, chayote and salt and pepper and heat, stirring occasionally, for 3 or 4 more minutes. Taste and adjust seasonings. Serve warm with or without tortillas.

Guacamole Guatemalteo (Guatemalan Guacamole)

Adapted from "Beauty of Guatemalan Cuisine"

No tomatoes in this great version of guacamole. When I saw the ingredients I was not very excited, but this is so good that it is WAY too easy to eat. Don't say I didn't warn you! A chopped small fresh red chili would make this even better and prettier, I think. Enjoy! Serves 4-6

4 ripe avocados
greens from 4 scallions, thinly sliced
2T mayonnaise
1t salt
1-2T lemon or lime juice
1t ground black pepper, or combination black and chili (like chipotle) pepper powder
Pinch cumin (optional)



Cut avocados in half, remove pits and scoop flesh into a bowl. Add all remaining ingredients and mash with a fork or potato masher until fairly smooth and well mixed. If a smoother consistency is desired, whip with a whisk for a few seconds. Chill for at least half an hour before serving with corn chips.

Guatemalan Red Cabbage Relish

Adapted from <http://www.marthastewart.com/recipe/guatemalan-red-cabbage-relish>

Cabbage salads and relishes are standard fare on the Guatemalan table and this one is absolutely stunning in both flavor and appearance! Try it. This is not your grandmother's coleslaw!

Serves 8 generously.

1 medium to medium-small head red cabbage, finely shredded	grated zest from one orange (wash first), orange part only
2 bay leaves	¼ cup finely chopped cilantro or parsley, your choice
2 carrots, shredded	1/8t ground allspice
1-2 jalapenos, seeded and minced	1t ground cumin
4 scallions, thinly sliced	3-4T dark brown sugar
¼c lime juice	Salt
¾c red wine vinegar	Ground black pepper
¾c good olive oil	

Bring a large pot of salted water with bay leaves in it to a boil. Drop cabbage in and cook 2 minutes. Drain well and cool. Remove bay leaves. Transfer cooled, drained cabbage to a large bowl and add carrot, jalapenos and scallions and toss lightly. In another, smaller bowl whisk together the lime juice, vinegar, olive oil, orange zest, cilantro or parsley, allspice cumin and brown sugar. Add about one teaspoon of salt (may need more) and ½ teaspoon of pepper and whisk again until sugar is dissolved. Add dressing to cabbage mixture and toss to combine. Taste and adjust seasonings. Keep for up to 3 days, tightly covered.



Mayan Spiced Chocolate Icebox Cookies

I adapted this recipe from a recipe in the January 2007 Making Connections.

I used some Maya Nut flour in this recipe, which I had to hoped to but was unable to obtain from The Equilibrium Fund in time for recipe testing. They do not sell the flour on their website. Fortunately, you may purchase it from

<http://www.mayancafedemojo.com/home.html>. These cookies are delicious, a little spicy and very chocolaty. Allow time to refrigerate the dough before baking. They burn easily so be extremely careful baking them!! Makes at least 4 dozen small cookies, more if sliced rather than rolled. See note below.

1c all-purpose flour

½ c Maya Nut flour

¾ c unsweetened cocoa powder (I used extra dark)

¼ t salt

¼ t ground chipotle chili

¼ t finely ground black pepper

¾-1t cinnamon powder

1 ½ sticks unsalted butter, room temperature

1 ½ t vanilla extract

½ c sugar

½ c brown sugar

1 large egg

Sift together the flours, cocoa, salt, pepper, chipotle and cinnamon and set aside. In a large bowl of an electric mixer cream the butter. Add the vanilla and sugars and beat to mix thoroughly. Beat in the egg and then on low speed, gradually add the sifted dry ingredients, scraping the bowl down and beating until just mixed. The dough may climb the beaters, just stop and mix in a bowl by hand the rest of the way. Lightly flour a board and turn the dough out onto the board. Flour your hands and roll the dough out into a log about 14 inches long by 2 inches in diameter. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate at least one hour before baking. The dough may be refrigerated for a couple of days, or even frozen for future use, but you must let it thaw a little (if frozen) before slicing. Position two racks so they are evenly spaced in the oven, dividing the oven into thirds. Do not bake too close to the bottom of the oven. Preheat the oven to 350.

Unwrap the dough and place it on a cutting board. Slice dough into slices about 1/3 inch thick and place on ungreased cookie sheets about 1½ inches apart. Bake for 9-10 minutes, rotating the sheets and switching the top one with the bottom one halfway through to help the cookies bake evenly. BE VERY CAREFUL NOT TO BURN THEM. Because they are so dark in color it is hard to tell when they are burning. Allow cookies to cool on the sheet for a few seconds to firm up before moving to a cooling rack with a spatula. Store airtight after completely cool. They will be even better the second day, if they last that long, and will keep for about 3-4 days.

NOTE: This technique will produce a crispy cookie. If you prefer your cookies soft, as I usually do, then just leave flatten the dough into a disc, wrap and chill for ½ an hour to an hour max. Take out of refrigerator and pinch off small pieces of dough, rather than slicing it, and roll the pieces into 1-inch balls, place on the cookie sheets and flatten slightly. Bake as directed. They do not spread much so they may be placed fairly close together.

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 Changing the world one dinner at a time.

www.diningforwomen.org

ⁱ Guatemalan rainforest statistics taken from Mongobay.com. <http://rainforests.mongabay.com/deforestation/2000/Guatemala.htm>

ⁱⁱ "Assessing the multiple disadvantages of Mayan girls: The effects of gender, ethnicity, poverty and residence on education in Guatemala," by Kelly Hallman, Sara Peracca, Jennifer Catino and Marta Julia Ruiz. *Transitions to Adulthood*, Brief no. 16, June 2007.