

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Punta Gorda

Toledo, Belize



Celebrating three years of success in the agroforestry concession

Thirty farmers in Toledo are celebrating their third year of successful farming in Belize's first agroforestry concession within a protected area. The cultivation of cacao among other crops within the Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve is being guided by an agroforestry management plan and a conservation agreement. Ya'axché Conservation Trust (Ya'axché) is working with farmers to ensure that both the environment and livelihoods are considered in protected area management.

In 2012, 30 landless farmers with interests of farming within Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve made contact with Ya'axché to support their aspirations. Ya'axché, along with the farmers, developed an agroforestry management plan to guide the cultivation of cacao under the forest canopy and created a conservation agreement that incorporated the commitment of the farmers to protect the area of natural wonder. In June of 2014, the Government of Belize granted the establishment of Belize's first agroforestry concession within a protected area to the newly formed Trio Farmers Cacao Growers Association.

To date, the farmers have planted over 58,000 cacao trees covering 165 acres, within the 936-acre agroforestry concession. In addition to cacao, the farmers have produced 3,000 plantains, 8,712 pounds of corn, 800 pounds of honey, and harvested significant quantities of vegetables. By 2019, each farmer will have increased their harvest by planting an additional four acres of cacao. These accomplishments have been made possible through the material, technical and field support provided by Ya'axché, funded through international donors.

The Trio Farmers Cacao Growers Association is hosting a celebration of their three years of success in the 936-acre agroforestry concession in southern Belize. The half-day event, to be held at the Julian Cho Technical High School Auditorium, will begin at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, November 30th, 2017. The Association's Board of Directors will be recognized, awards will be presented to outstanding farmers, and the past, present, and future work of the farmers and Ya'axché within Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve will be shared.

Ya'axché Conservation Trust has been empowering communities and conserving wildlife in southern Belize since 1998. Much of the organization's effort has focused on promoting sustainable farming practices. The success of the agroforestry concession model within Maya Mountain North Forest Reserve can be used in other protected areas, such as forest reserves which allow farming to occur, to support livelihoods and protect nature.

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