

# New flavors emerge from Peruvian cacao collection trip

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New cacao types with unique flavors that are distinctly Peruvian have been identified by U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) scientists. These new flavors could one day be marketed like wine, by geographical provenance.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS) scientists at the agency's Sustainable [Perennial Crops](#) Laboratory (SPCL) and Systematic Mycology and Microbiology Laboratory (SMML), both in Beltsville, Md., and Peruvian collaborators found these new cacao plants during collection expeditions in 2008 and 2009 in the [Amazon Basin](#) of Peru.

ARS is USDA's principal intramural scientific research agency, and this research supports the USDA priority of promoting international food security.

The researchers found hundreds of new cacao tree samples during the trips. One of these, discovered by collaborators from Marañon Chocolate, was Pure Nacional, an old, very rare, and highly coveted variety that has garnered a great deal of interest from makers of fine-flavored chocolates. Chocolate is produced from cacao.

This industry covets new and unique flavor sources. Usually, [cacao trees](#) are found along rivers, but these gems were found at a higher altitude than normal, and in Peru instead of Ecuador or Venezuela.

SPCL research leader Lyndel Meinhardt and geneticist Dapeng Zhang

collaborated with the Instituto de Cultivos Tropicales (ICT), a research center in San Martin, Peru, to identify the new varieties of cacao. The researchers are studying 342 cacao specimens collected from 12 watersheds and categorizing the DNA of the specimens.

ARS and ICT are helping Peru create its own niche in the chocolate industry by working with San Martin's Oro Verde cooperative and Maranon [Chocolate](#). Peru's tropical conditions-60 percent of the country is covered in tropical forest-make it ideal for producing [cacao](#), and specialty chocolates.

**More information:** Read more about this research in the September 2011 issue of Agricultural Research magazine.

[www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/sep11/cacao0911.htm](http://www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/sep11/cacao0911.htm)

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