

Features

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The Breadfruit Project

Jennifer Polanz

Q: Can you briefly describe the breadfruit project?

Josh Schneider: In collaboration with the Breadfruit Institute, housed at the National Tropical Botanical Garden in Hawaii, Cultivaris developed the first commercial propagation methods for breadfruit. This allows us to grow and propagate the best of the traditional varieties of breadfruit and offer them to farmers throughout the tropics as a productive and profitable agricultural crop. Bread-fruit has been a staple of the Pacific islands' agricultural



systems for more than 3,000 years. A single breadfruit tree has the capacity to feed a family of four for over 50 years and more than 80% of the 1 billion people afflicted by hunger live in tropical climates, suitable for its cultivation. The crop is nearly identical to the consistency of a potato and can be prepared in countless ways, including being processed into a gluten-free flour with similar baking characteristics of wheat flour, but possessing superior nutritional benefits.

Q: How did Cultivaris get involved?

JS: I was actually working with the lead Breadfruit Institute researcher on another project when she mentioned that they could use our help on the Breadfruit Project. After a few months of discussions we developed a framework for collaboration between Cultivaris and the Breadfruit Institute. That landmark agreement gave us the exclusive right to sell the best varieties in the collection that had been developed over 25 years of collecting in the Pacific. In addition, Cultivaris pays a royalty of \$1 to the Breadfruit Institute for every plant sold and of that, 50% is returned to the country of origin (where the variety was collected/ native). What this does is comply with the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and allow us to share the benefits with the countries of origin. The money is used to provide funding for projects relevant to agricultural development and sustainable farming.

Q: How can retailers get involved with this?

JS: For starters they could share news of what we're doing from our Facebook page on their page and encourage customers to support the aid organizations that we work with, like the Trees That Feed Foundation (www.treesthatfeed.org). Trees that Feed has planted thousands of breadfruit in Haiti and every day they feed more than 1,000 orphans. This shows the importance that plants have in people's lives and how ideas can change the world. The hardest thing is to have to limit how much you can help people because of a lack of funding.

My project in Liberia this past summer saw the Breadfruit Institute fund 1,000 trees and I went there myself and helped train the farmers. Of course, Ebola was all over already, though the government was still denying its existence on the international stage. After a few days in the capital city of Monrovia for meetings and presentations, I had people outside my hotel room door every morning asking to buy a tree. Liberia is one of the poorest countries on earth and these people saw the value of a tree that could give them autonomy, could be a modular economic development tool and help them feed their family and make some money. We had requests for more than 10,000 trees, so we are now waiting additional funding to help meet this demand.

Q: What has been the most rewarding part of being involved in this?

JS: The best part about this project is the ability to make a huge difference in so many lives. I have had the opportunity to travel all over the globe with this tree and no matter where I go, I get to see what a difference it makes in the lives of people who just want to take care of themselves and their families. Helping them do that by providing them some trees really gives me a sense of satisfaction that is unmatched.

Continue following the story at www.globalbreadfruit.com or at www.breadfruit.org. **GP**