

## **Maya Nut (*Brosimum alicastrum*): Traditional rainforest food for healthy forests and families in Central America**

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### **Abstract**

Maya nut (*Brosimum alicastrum*) is a delicious, nutritious and abundant neotropical rainforest tree seed which was a staple food for pre-Columbian hunter gatherers who cultivated it in “food forests” near their communities. Maya nuts are exceptionally nutritious, providing high quality protein, calcium, potassium, iron, folate, fiber, vitamins A, E, C and B in quantities similar to soy and amaranth. In recent history Maya nut has been critical to rural food security; Thousands of villages have survived drought and famine by eating Maya nut when no other food was available. Maya nut is also an excellent forage species and shows great promise for environmentally friendly cattle production in the neotropics. As the preferred food for over 85% of neotropical birds and wildlife, Maya nut is critical for biodiversity conservation. Unfortunately knowledge about Maya nut has dropped to near zero throughout its range as globalization, export crops and deforestation negatively impact indigenous cultures and the forests which sustain them. The Maya nut tree is in danger of extinction throughout its range, a situation which threatens the food security of human and animal populations. The Equilibrium Fund’s Maya nut program rescues lost traditional knowledge about the Maya nut in Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean. We focus on women as the caretakers of the family and the environment and create leadership, educational and economic opportunities for women and girls. Since 2001 we have trained over 7000 women from 312 rural communities in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico about the Maya nut. As a result of this program 400,000 ha. of Maya nut forests have been conserved, 150,000 new Maya Nut seedlings have been planted and more than 320 women have formed microenterprises to produce and market Maya nut.