



# Dagoba Organic Chocolate

**TRANSFORMING THE PLANET**

Dagoba founder Frederick Schilling and some of his creations.



Frederick Schilling is an alchemist for the new century. Instead of messing with basic elements like lead and sulfur, toiling to turn them into gold, he's applying the principles of transmutation on a much larger scale. That of the planet. His mission: To transform the rainforest. His *prima materia*: Chocolate.

Schilling is the founder of Ashland, Oregon-based Dagoba Organic Chocolate. The company is more than simply an enlightened organic chocolatier, it's an agent of change. Schilling's quest, and that of Dagoba's employees, including his mom, dad and sister, is to elevate social and environmental responsibility to the same level as profit, and demonstrate to industry that the three can be balanced holistically to achieve lasting success. Dagoba does this by paying sustainable wages to cacao farmers, recycling religiously, using renewable energy and consistently producing mind-altering chocolate.

To make truly transcendent chocolate, you need exceptional cacao. Schilling's definition of exceptional doesn't end with taste—it encompasses organic cultivation practices, Fair Trade principles, and the reversal of rainforest destruction, loss of heirloom cacao varieties and farmer poverty. To find it, he travels the globe.

Small independent family farms produce 99% of the world's cacao, says Schilling. The farmers are scattered throughout the rainforest and rely on a variety of crops for their livelihood. As one crop is harvested, another is ripening. The cycle ensures a steady trickle of income and contributes to cacao's sustainability and its health. "Cacao is very prone to disease, it's really finicky," says Schilling. "By surrounding it in a biodiverse setting, you create barriers to disease."

Cacao thrives in the shade of the rainforest's canopy. This plays a crucial role in rainforest preservation and reforestation efforts, says Schilling. The greater the demand for cacao, the greater the need for rainforest. "It's really become a personal mission to use this as a vehicle for change," he adds.

To further conservation, Dagoba partners with cacao-producing communities to encourage sustainable growing practices. In one project, Dagoba and several industry partners helped Costa Rican farmers form

a cooperative to reclaim abandoned cacao fields that were devastated by disease in the 80s. By providing the knowledge to revitalize the fields and a market for the cacao, the project infused the local communities and rainforest with new life.

Dagoba makes these efforts real to its customers through single origin chocolate—Pacuare from Costa Rica, Los Rios from Ecuador, Milagros from Peru—that celebrates the distinctive flavor imparted to cacao by elements of regional geography. However, Schilling is wary of the "green washing" that he observes in industries dealing with many developing nation producers. Dagoba is ready to assist communities, but the decisions are ultimately up to the local people. "We're all human, we all have dignity, we don't need to be told what to do," he says. By paying equitable prices for cacao, Schilling seeks to empower communities. "It's up to the community to determine what they want to do with the money. They live there, not me."

Empowering others and motivating companies bigger than Dagoba excites Schilling. "I didn't start the company to be this small artisan organic chocolate company," he says. "That's very romantic and la-la-la. Ten years ago, I was in a band with hair down to my ass, as anti-corporate as the next person. But I've come to realize that business really is the key to making change happen in the world."

In October, Hershey's Food bought Dagoba. Schilling is excited by the new possibilities created by the merger. "By leveraging their volume for cacao and by having them want to adopt our sourcing practices, the impact that we can have on farmers and the rainforest is a million times greater than Dagoba could ever have done on our own," he says.

It's been over five years since Schilling, much like the ancient alchemists, began mixing ingredients in his kitchen, hand-pouring and hand-wrapping each bar, and sharing the rich brown gold with others. Dagoba has emerged from Schilling's ethos, embodying a profound respect for the environment and a reverence for cacao, its farmers and the possibility they hold to transform the rainforest and heal the planet. Schilling's life and his chocolate are indeed powerful forces for transformation. Out of this, comes everything. ■

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