

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 18<sup>th</sup> 2017

Punta Gorda

Toledo, Belize



## **Belize National Cacao Committee kicks off**

On Thursday, September 14<sup>th</sup> the first ever **Belize National Cacao Committee** was formed at a second community forestry forum organized by Ya'axché Conservation Trust, which took place in San Pedro Columbia, Toledo District. The formation of the committee, which was proposed at a previously-held forum, comes at a critical time for the growing cacao industry. Although the number of farmers cultivating cacao in southern Belize has been steadily growing since the 1980s, never before have the stakeholders assembled to determine the direction in which they would like the industry to move.

The newly-formed committee is tasked with moving the cacao industry forward in an organized and unified manner by determining the needs of the cacao industry, in consultation with stakeholders, and lobbying the government to secure policies to support those goals. Other proposed objectives for the committee include working toward regulating and stabilizing the price of cacao beans, establishing a memorandum of understanding that clarifies guidelines for farmers and buyers, and formulating a monitoring and evaluation plan.

The committee is composed of representatives from the various stakeholders in the cacao industry, including farmers, buyers, non-governmental organizations, and government. The following are the initial members of the committee, who were nominated at the event:

- Ministry of Agriculture represented by **Justaquio Tush**
- **Gabriel Pop** - Na Luum Cacao Institute, Toledo District
- **Justino Peck** - Toledo Cacao Growers Association, Toledo District
- **Gustavo Requena** - Ya'axché Conservation Trust, Toledo District
- **Julio Saqui** - Che'il Mayan Products, Stann Creek District
- **Emergildo Ah** - Cacao Farmer, San Antonio Village, Toledo District
- **Bartolo Teul** - Cacao Farmer, Big Falls Village, Toledo District
- **Minni Forman** - Maya Mountain Cacao, Toledo District
- **Manuel Tut** - Trio Farmers Cacao Growers Association, Toledo District
- **Elmer Tzalam** - BFREE, Toledo District

Prior to another follow-up forum, the committee will meet to establish roles, responsibilities and goals.

END.