

#5- INARU - Redefining Cocoa Supply Chains with Purpose-Driven Innovation

Founder: Janett Liriano



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Introduction

Janett Liriano, founder and CEO of INARU, founded a company dedicated to transforming the cocoa industry through sustainable and traceable supply chains. Rooted in her Dominican heritage and passion for food, Janett set out to create a business that not only produces high-quality chocolate but also supports farmers and their communities. INARU stands out as an infrastructure business, challenging traditional industry practices with a commitment to ethical sourcing, fair pay, and environmental stewardship.

Background and Inspiration

Janett grew up in Queens, New York, in a family of Dominican immigrants, where food played a central role. "Food was actually always top of the conversation at the dinner table," Janett recalled, describing how her parents often compared the fresh, farm-grown food they knew in the Dominican Republic to the commercialized food in the U.S. This deep connection to her cultural roots and the importance of food quality shaped her perspective from a young age.

After studying at Emerson College and gaining diverse experiences across industries like tech, textures, and biopharma, Janett felt a strong pull to align her career with her values. During the pandemic, Janett and her family spent time in the Dominican Republic, where they reconnected with their farming roots. "My parents were kind of challenging me to ask myself, when are you going to do something that's aligned with your values?" Janett explained. The time spent on her father's cocoa farm sparked the idea to build INARU, a company that could disrupt traditional agricultural business models.

From Idea to Launch

Building INARU was no small feat. Janett describes the company as "not only a chocolate company; it's an infrastructure business." INARU focuses on traceability and ethical sourcing, working directly with farmers to ensure that the supply chain is transparent and sustainable.

The journey from concept to launch was filled with challenges, particularly around fundraising. Despite Janett's previous successes in raising millions in other industries, she found it difficult to

secure funding for INARU. "The challenge of getting people to believe in food and believe in the changing of the commodities industry was a serious challenge," she said. Janett and her family invested their own savings, moved back to the Dominican Republic, and lived in a small apartment as they poured everything into building the business. The early years were marked by financial uncertainty, but their perseverance paid off, leading to commercial success and building their own factory.

The INARU Model: Beyond Chocolate Bars

INARU's model goes beyond producing chocolate bars; the company aims to be a transformative force in the cocoa industry by offering traceable and ethically sourced cocoa products to other brands. "We see ourselves as this really necessary intermediate step towards that evolution," Janett explained. By offering cocoa mass, cocoa butter, and other B2B ingredients, INARU helps larger chocolate companies transition to ethical sourcing without the need to overhaul their entire operations.

This unique positioning allows INARU to act as a bridge between smallholder farmers and major global players. "We can be a really great B2B ingredients partner to the thousands of chocolate companies that exist today," said Janett. By partnering with INARU, companies can benefit from traceability and ethical sourcing while maintaining their product lines.

Sustainability and Impact

A critical aspect of INARU's mission is its commitment to sustainability. The company works closely with farmers to ensure that their farming practices are organic and regenerative. "We test the soil, the bean, the chocolate," Janett said, underscoring their rigorous approach to quality control. When heavy metals or other contaminants are detected, INARU assists farmers in identifying and mitigating the sources.

Financial empowerment for farmers is another cornerstone of INARU's impact. The company pays at least 30% above traditional cacao prices and shares incentives from the finished products. "Receiving an additional \$1,000 or \$2,000 is massive in these communities," Janett highlighted, illustrating the significant impact this makes for the farmers.

INARU also invests in knowledge transfer by funding regenerative farming plots, providing education, and building local capacity. "We're building capacity locally," Janett emphasized. The company employs Dominican locals in their factory, creating jobs and fostering a community of skilled chocolate makers in the Dominican Republic.

Challenges and Success Stories

Despite its impact, INARU has faced challenges, particularly in overcoming preconceived notions about the quality of products from regions like the Dominican Republic. "The assumption is that quality doesn't come from these regions, and that's what we're really focused on changing," Janett noted. By producing exceptional chocolate and sharing it with the world, INARU is slowly shifting these perceptions.

One of Janett's proudest achievements is seeing her vision come to life. "When I walk into this factory and see that our Slack channel has grown from one to 30, and people are wearing their clothes and stuff, it's surreal," she reflected. For Janett, the biggest success is not just in the products they create but in the community they have built—one that believes in the mission of INARU and works tirelessly to achieve it.

Future Vision and Conclusion

Looking ahead, Janett envisions INARU expanding its reach and influence. She hopes to see INARU products in major airports and luxury private label partnerships with high-end brands. "I would love for kids to be excited about, 'Oh, we got this chocolate,'" she said, illustrating her dream of becoming a beloved brand associated with quality.

Janett Liriano's INARU is a testament to how purpose-driven innovation can reshape entire industries. By prioritizing ethical sourcing, sustainability, and community empowerment, INARU is not just making chocolate—it's creating a model for how food businesses can do good while doing well. As Janett aptly put it, "If we can build evil systems, we can build good systems—you just have to decide."

You can find their products at [inaru.com](https://www.inaru.com)!

Adam's Takeaway

In our conversation, Janett mentioned that "she doesn't believe in 'competition,' in their place, there should be ecosystems." She gave the example of the forest "there are some big trees, there are some small trees, but everything plays a role and contributes to a larger healthy ecosystem." In capitalist economies, we're often pit against one another and told to achieve more success than the other, however, the greatest successes come from teamwork and helping the ecosystem succeed in a sustainable, healthy way.