

**For more information:**

Rick Boosey  
Co-founder, Kyya Chocolate  
Rboosey@kyyachocolate.com

David G. Albers, P.E.  
Instructor & Student Projects Coordinator  
Department of Mechanical Engineering  
dalbers@uark.edu

Anne Marie Velliquette  
Clinical Assistant Professor  
Department of Marketing Transportation  
AVelliquette@walton.uark.edu

Jean-Francois Meullenet  
Professor and Head  
Department of Food Science  
jfmeull@uark.edu

**For Immediate Release**

June 23, 2015

## Arkansas' first bean-to-bar chocolatier finds guidance, innovation at University of Arkansas

Kyya Chocolate offers real-world, hands-on experience for three departments

NORTHWEST ARKANSAS—Students in three departments at the University of Arkansas are gaining real-world, hands-on experience through working with the state's first bean-to-bar chocolatier, Kyya Chocolate.

The projects include:

- Working with the Integrated Marketing Communications class (Department of Marketing) to develop a comprehensive marketing plan (Spring 2015);
- Working with the Food Science Department to improve Kyya's ability to identify flavor profiles in the cocoa fields and further develop their chocolate-making expertise (current); and
- Working with the Mechanical Engineering Department to streamline both machinery and processes to allow for better efficiency and scalability (Fall 2015).

Kyya Chocolate is the first bean-to-bar chocolatier in Arkansas. They are one of only about 10 percent of chocolatiers in the United States to own a cocoa press, which allows them to make their own chocolate powder and cocoa butter. Co-founders Rick and Cindy Boosey first started making chocolate in 2012 and rebranded to become Kyya Chocolate in 2014.

Kyya purchases its beans through fair trade brokers and directly through a growing number of small cacao farmers. The goal is to develop relationships with 40 farmers across the world in countries where most chocolatiers don't purchase their chocolate. The plan is to donate 10 percent of their profits to assist the communities from which they purchase the chocolate.

"The University is building expertise and offering advanced degrees that can extend the body of knowledge with regards to chocolate," Rick Boosey said. "That requires that they develop new approaches to chocolate science and technology, We're a younger chocolate company that has this desire to make world-class chocolate and take chocolate 'science' to a new level. Most farm-to-bar chocolate companies have a lack of technology to help validate cocoa bean characteristics in the field. We believe that kind of technology would extend the growing number of chocolatiers who can know the characteristics of the chocolate they employ.

"Most students work out of a textbook and don't always know how the real world works. These projects are on a smaller scale but a big enough challenge that it teaches them a lot," Boosey concluded.

Dr. Anne Marie Velliquette, clinical assistant professor, teaches the Integrated Marketing Communications class. She said the students divided into "Ad agencies" and developed a brand and logo for their respective agencies. Their task with Kyya was to create three distinct yet integrated ads, a social media campaign, and a written creative marketing brief. The Booseys then examined each team's information and provided feedback on how well they thought the plans fit with their brand and goals.

"It was a challenging, yet very rewarding experience for the students," she said. "They were able to gain experience in two distinct advertising agency roles: that of the creative designer as well as the account executive."

Velliquette added that the hands-on client experience provides great resume and job interview material for students.

Jean-Francois Meullenet, professor and head of the Department of Food Science, said Kyya has hired two students from the Food Science Department who are interning with Kyya. In addition, one of the food science professors, Dr. Andy Proctor, will work with Kyya on "ideas about flavor development during chocolate processing as influenced by processing steps and bean origin."

Meullenet continued with thoughts on how the partnership benefits the University.

"We have always been a department that has significant interactions with the local food industry. As a relatively new company, Kyya is a great candidate for relationship development," he said. "We do have a lot of technical expertise in food science and we have an interest in assisting startups with expertise we have. We have formalized our assistance to small food companies through the Arkansas Food Innovation Center and hope that Kyya will be able to develop a relationship with the department through AFIC."

David G. Albers, instructor and student projects coordinator with the Department of Mechanical Engineering, said the plan for his department is to have "students design, build and test a benchtop system to grind cocoa beans and separate the hulls from the nibs," using Kyya's resources and the students' expertise.

He agreed that the arrangement is beneficial for both the students and Kyya.

"Students get extensive theoretical training in their four years at the University through texts and homework," he said. "This project develops their ability to apply that training to solve a problem in a way that is useful to a customer while meeting realistic constraints of: time, money, complexity, and reliability/serviceability.

"In short it is a step in closing the gap between technically competent engineers and engineers who are ready to engineer upon graduation," he concluded. "The benefit to KYYA is that they get a fresh perspective on their process and approach to the problem."