



COCOA ASSOCIATION OF ASIA (CAA) CELEBRATES THE RESILIENCE OF THE ASIAN COCOA INDUSTRY

From 1–2 Sep, the Cocoa Association of Asia (CAA) hosted more than 500 participants at Singapore’s Raffles City Convention Centre. It was an impactful two-day event, a melting pot of keen observations and insightful opinions from global experts passionate about Asia’s cocoa industry.

THE two-day conference centred around plenary sessions that touched on topics of worldwide interest, followed by panel discussions that were masterfully moderated. Apart from being treated to live discussions among panelists on thought provoking issues, the audience could also submit any questions they had and the panel would answer them on the spot.

Day 1 started off with a look at how global events had an economic impact worldwide. Mr Karmjit Singh, Chairman of The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport Singapore, presented an macroeconomic outlook for Asia and the world. He observed that

while the Southeast Asian market is limited and fragmented, suffers from low productivity and is subject to volatile pricing, it is a region that has big potential for cocoa and chocolate. This is because the region’s demographics consists of a dynamic and youthful population. Other factors include a shorter supply chain and lower logistics costs across Asia. To boost the region’s economy, both private and public sectors could increase investments in processing and grinding factories as well as in the chocolate manufacturing sector.

Oscar Tjakra, Executive Director of Rabobank, discussed what the future holds for cocoa production



and consumption in Asia. Some of the salient points of this presentation include the observation that cocoa beans production in Asia has been declining, and Southeast Asian cocoa processors need to import cocoa beans due to lack of local production. Oscar also pointed out that container spot rates have subsided significantly from 2021, except for the trans-Atlantic lane from Europe to North America due to strong market demand on that lane and port congestion.

It does not look like the rates can fall back to 2020 levels. Schedule reliability will eventually recover, but congestions are expected to remain at key ports until the first half of 2023.

The highlight for many participants was the plenary session on Marketing and Innovation Trends for Asian Cocoa and Chocolate. Nicole Jansen, Leads Insights & Innovation Team of Innova Markets Insights, presented a very interesting session on how market trends will impact cocoa and chocolate in Asia. The key points of her presentation include:

- Health, indulgence and sustainability are the key innovation pillars in Asia's sweet packed goods market.
- Flavour remains paramount, but health is a key factor that drives purchases.
- Asian consumers are increasingly concerned about the environment.
- In APAC, between 20–41% of consumers increased their consumption of chocolate over the past year.
- There are four key trends borne of the pandemic, and they are here to stay: holistic wellbeing (health and wellness), back to the roots (fresh and authentic local food), amplified experiences (the desire for new experiences), crossing channels (change of eating habits)

Another important trend that has reverberated across global industries is sustainability. Fay Fay Choo, Asia Cocoa Director of Mars, presented the case for sustainability and social responsibility in Asian cocoa. Fay Fay also led another presentation on women in the cocoa industry, where she pointed out the critical role of women in advancing agricultural and rural development, as well as ensuring food security.

To understand what on behind the scenes while the event organisers planned this two-day conference, APFI Magazine speaks to two of the key individuals that made this gathering possible.



Alvin Lee
Commercial Director,
Asia Pacific,
Cargill Cocoa &
Chocolate Chairman,
Cocoa Association of Asia



Shirley Choo
Chief Operating Officer,
Director of Marketing
Cocoa Association of Asia

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THIS YEAR'S CONFERENCE?

Alvin: Much bigger turnout compared to 5 years ago. Due to the fact that the association has matured and membership has increased significantly. This reflects well on the CAA, as it shows that it has remained relevant all this time. During the pandemic, as an industry we saw the need to come together to share information. CAA held regular webinars by members who shared their expertise on risk management, insurance, and international trading rules and regulations, and this conference was a

culmination of all that sharing, and 2022 was a great opportunity to do so after a five year hiatus. First major international cocoa event in two years.

The theme has changed quite a bit. In 2017, when we were more fledgling as an association, the theme was: Make Asian Cocoa Great Again, it's about making Asian cocoa players heard. Now that the industry has grown and matured, the focus has shifted, hence the theme: Resilience. Shows an increase in confidence of the region to stand on its own.

We have an international crowd, but the focus is more on Asia compared to the last one, where the focus pandered more towards the international audience.

Like this year, sustainability is on the agenda.

Shirley: This year marks the second edition of the CAA International Cocoa Conference (CAAICC) that is held biennially. It was supposed to be held in March 2020, but it was postponed due to COVID-19.

The first CAAICC was held in 2017 at Resorts World Sentosa, which saw more than 400 guests attending the conference. Prior to 2017, the sessions were focussed more on networking and were primarily attended by member organisations.

CAA as an association is also unique and slightly different from some of its counterparts in other regions, as we represent both the cocoa and chocolate verticals that encourage dialogue across the whole cocoa eco-system from traders, processors, end customers, and auxiliary service providers.

This year, the big differences we saw were not only in terms of participation size (a whopping 530 participants from more than 30 countries attended the conference). The participants, speakers and panellists that joined us were highly qualified experts of diverse backgrounds.

This year, there was also a stronger focus on sustainability. For example, we introduced two other discussions, one on Women in Cocoa & Chocolate in Asia, and What Industries Can Do to Produce Climate Friendly Cocoa, which was done in partnership with our Industry Development partner USAID Green Invest Asia.

The plenary sessions that were held over 2 days focussed not just on key challenges faced by the industry but also, more importantly, on the opportunities for cocoa and chocolate verticals, and an adaptation of industry processes with a growing interest and demand in Asia. Asia reached its record Q2 year in 10 years grinding in the Asia region 228,895MT for Q2'22 vs 150,726MT in Q2'12, and a record year in 2021 at 877,002MT.



COULD YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THE THEME OF “RESILIENCE”?

Alvin: Unlike grains and oils, cocoa isn't really seen as a stable industry, because the demand is not as stable compared to staples like grains and oils. The focus of all governments worldwide was on critical necessities like COVID resources (PPE, vaccines), staple foods, instead of less crucial resources like cocoa and chocolate. And then after that, during the harsher parts of lockdowns, when we could push for what people want, to inject a little bit of joy.

Coupled with supply chain issues, cocoa industry is still surviving, which is a testament to its resilience. Is Asia still the place for cocoa and chocolate? How is that going to affect demand? What do we need to focus on in order to be successful? We have the highest growth compared to our European counterparts.

WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR THE COCOA INDUSTRY?

Alvin: Sustainability. In terms of regulations and policies, Europe is far more advanced. In order to export to the EU, we have to comply with the EU's regulations. How do we future proof ourselves? We're gonna have to improve traceability (where does your cocoa come from? Deforested areas? At the expense of wildlife? Is your cocoa child labour free?)

Shirley: Making trade flows more sustainable and having a robust talent pipeline were some of the key takeaways for now and the future. The experts among us note that consumers will look forward to seeing the industry become more digitalized, with a focus on decarbonisation, diversification/diversity and differentiation/inclusion.

Public-private partnership should be quickly enhanced as Singapore continues to position itself as a key regional R&D platform to new green technology, CAA looks forward to a continued partnership with Enterprise SG and regional stakeholders by launching several initiatives including the launch of an innovation challenge as announced during the Gala



dinner. More details on the innovation challenge will be shared in the coming months, on finding ways to a more sustainable, resilient agriculture while securing the livelihoods of farmers.

Sustainability and Resilience of the industry will continue to be key focus areas for the CAA and its members whether may it be through Digitalisation, talent development and education. However, organisations will likely deep-dive to review the integrity of their existing supply chain, and a constant exercising of crisis management plans to ensure the trade and chocolate continues to flow come what may.

Having a ready pipeline of local talent and a dynamic supply chain system will be critical for companies to respond to anticipated and unseen challenges. CAA feels that it is not only important for companies to understand the current market issues but that employees should continue to upskill and keep abreast of the current and future trends such as in managing an effective supply chain system.

In that same spirit, CAA signed a collaborative agreement with The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport, Singapore. Participants who sign up this course via the CAA-CILT platform will not only be able to read the modules online and join the in-person workshops, but also be equipped with life-long knowledge of supply chain management skills. This course is also offered today via a university. However, the workshops are only offered to participants who sign up through CAA. Interested parties can reach CAA at enquiry@cocoaasia.org.

CAA would like to thank all our sponsors, participants, distinguished panellists for their time. We look forward to their participation again in 2024 for a third edition of the CAAICC. **APFI**



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