

Truly Raw Cashews Info

The foremost direct source for truly raw cashews in the world! Over the course of the past 6 years, Big Tree Farms (BTF) has developed the single highest integrity cold-processed Cashew supply chain in the world. By working directly with raw food experts from the US, EU and Australia, Big Tree Farms has built a sustainable supply chain from farm-gate to market based on a global demand for living cashews.

The pitfalls have been many, the learning curve steep; but the resulting cashews have been praised by both those on the raw food path and those simply looking for high quality and great tasting nuts. There is simply no alternative to Truly Raw™ cashews; sweeter, richer and more appetizing than any other cashew we have tasted. We know you'll agree. In 2007 we coined the term "Truly Raw" to create a clear distinction between our cold processed cashew products and other industry standard heat treated "raw" product.

Big Tree Farms works directly with small-scale cashew growers on the Isle of Flores to develop both ecological sustainability on these fragile volcanic lands and economic viability from this beautiful product.

Our cashews are handpicked from Organically Certified trees in Eastern Flores. The cashews are "cracked" open with traditional knives and hand-polished to remove the "kulit ari", a thin skin protecting the kernel. The result is a truly raw cashew kernel so incredibly sweet, soft and white that you simply won't believe your taste buds!

Following this traditional process of hand-processing cashews is a labor of love that has nearly disappeared around the globe...Traditional producers on average can only prepare 2 kilos of raw kernels daily! But the difference between raw and conventionally processed cashews is unmistakable.

By reinvigorating the market for raw cashews we are able to keep the high value work of processing "on-farm" and greatly increase the compensation that cashew growers receive for their efforts.

More profit for growers means greater pride of product and more focus on the maintenance, harvest and post-harvest handling of these wonderful nuts...

Indirectly it also means happy eating for all our wonderful customers throughout the world!

Experience the difference in taste and quality... You'll never look for another cashew!

In 2005, Big Tree Farms began working with NGO, SwissContact, on the creation of a socially equitable value chain for cashew farmers in eastern Flores Island. The island of Flores and its southern neighbour, Sumba, account for the majority of cashews produced in Indonesia and yet there were no options for value addition by local producers. With no facilities for processing, all cashews were purchased in-shell and sold to processors in India or Vietnam. Prices were extremely low, exploitation was extremely high and no premiums were paid for differentiation if motivated producers did try to increase quality by sun drying and/or grading in-shell nuts.

Big Tree Farms developed a program that would allow smallholder cashew farmers to access premiums and begin to take control of value-addition processing. The first step was certification. Farmers in the program were certified organic for production and processing as well as for fair trade. This allowed producers to continue selling cashew-in-shell at a more viable price due to a somewhat stable premium of 10-15% allocated to organic and fair trade cashews.

Due to notoriously thin margins and high necessary volumes associated with cashew processing (estimated minimum processing quantity for conventional cashews is +/-500 metric ton/per annum), the challenge of Big Tree Farms program was to find an alternative processing scenario that would yield viable returns with relatively small bulk quantities.

The solution was to create a 100% raw, cold-processed cashew nut. The definition of raw for the cashew industry means not roasted; cashew-in-shell are either boiled in oil or scorched in fire in order to condition the shell prior to cracking and speed the process. However, during that heating process the cashew degrades significantly and essential fatty acids and enzymes are destroyed.

Big Tree Farms aids in the continued development of special knives which allow producers to both pierce and split the tough outer shell of the unheated cashew nut. Once the shell has been broken to expose the cashew kernel (still nestled snugly inside), producers use a thin stainless pick to pry the kernel out. These kernels are still encased in a thin red skin, or testa, which must be dehydrated to facilitate removal. For this process producers must either use solar dryers erected of bamboo and plastic greenhouse covers or sell the half-processed nuts to Big Tree Farms, as we maintain commercial-scale dehydrator equipment.

Either way the nuts are dehydrated at a maximum of 40C° (solar dryers operate at

approximately 35°) for 12-14 hours at which time the thin skin is rubbed from the kernel with cotton gloves. De-skinned cashews are then sent for final quality inspection where any imperfections are cleaned away with scalpel. Finished cashews are graded only as Wholes, Splits or Pieces and are returned to dehydration for a final 4-6 hours to guarantee packaging at a min of 5% moisture content.

The processing necessary for our Authentically Raw cashews is slow, relative to conventional processing, but the high quality and unbeatable flavour are unquestionable. As an example of this, typical cashews in India are processed at a rate of 12-14kg/worker/day while for our Authentically Raw cashews typical processing rates are only between 4-5kg/worker/day!

This great disparity in processing capacities translates to a significant difference in price, which in turn leads to a serious temptation for buyers and manufacturers of raw food products to purchase industry “raw” cashews (defined as non-roasted though still heat-treated) rather than support truly raw, cold-processed product.

A step-by-step guide to Authentically Raw Cashew Processing:

1. Picking and drying process of nuts

Naturally fallen raw cashews with 15-20% moisture are collected by the farmers. Raw cashews are sun dried for 2-3 days (maximum temperature is 30°C) until moisture level comes down to 10-12%.

2. Storing of nuts

Dried cashew nuts are packed in woven gunny sacks and stored in well ventilated rooms with giving enough space between stacks for air circulation. Dried cashew-in-shell are warehoused for up to 12 months without degradation although some further moisture is lost (2-3%).

3. Shelling of nuts

Raw cashew nuts are shelled manually by utilizing specially-made cutters in order to remove the shells and release the cashew kernels. Kernels at this stage are still covered in a testa or thin skin.

4. Drying process of kernels with testa

Cashew kernels with testa/skin are dehydrated at maximum 40 °C for 12-16 hours in order to reduce moisture level to 5%.

5. Peeling process of kernels

Testa/skin of the kernel is removed manually by cloth gloves and final quality check is done with scalpel to remove any remaining skin or blemish.

6. Packing of kernels (with or without testa)

Q: Will your cashews sprout?

A: Like most raw nuts some will sprout. Though the nut usually has to be in the husk with proper nutrients, moisture & temp before this process starts.

Q: How are your cashews harvested? Are they ever heated?

A: The skins are rubbed off by hand.

The nut is not boiled or roasted in any way like most.

The nuts are hand cracked & peeled.