

FLIP FOR OUR GLOBAL BEAUTY ISSUE

MAY 2018

marie claire

FRESH FACES

**MAKING HOLLYWOOD
GREAT AGAIN**

YARA SHAHIDI

HEAT WAVE

SWIMSUIT,
SANDALS,
SHADES
& OFF
YOU
GO!

**SOPHIE TURNER
ISSA RAE
RILEY KEOUGH
KATHERINE
LANGFORD**



The Cauca municipality is home to many of Colombia's indigenous people

Zue Beauty cofounders Gabriel Maya and Nathaly Millan (top row, both in black) with students, teachers, and community members of La Mesenia, Colombia



Quinoa growing in Jambaló, Colombia



Zue Beauty products feature a proprietary quinoa extract high in antioxidants (vitamins B, C, and E) and lysine, a protein that supports skin health.

ZUE BEAUTY Daily Facial Moisturizer, \$20

WHO WE LOVE Seeds of CHANGE

QUINOA-BASED SKINCARE LINE ZUE BEAUTY
FOCUSES ON SOCIAL ACTIVISM—AND SMOOTH SKIN

Olga Alvear Medina and fellow farmers in Colombia's indigenous Páez community have been at the mercy of their country's notorious drug wars for years. Her husband was killed by guerrillas four years ago, and armed groups with ties to drug cartels—many are dissidents of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN)—have been active in her hometown of Jambaló for decades. Just three years ago, a man who sold crafts in the local market was approached by guerillas and “asked to pay ‘vaccines,’” Alvear Medina explains, using the local term for the cut of profits taken in exchange for leaving locals alone. When he refused, “he was disappeared”—another victim of the country's armed conflict.

But this year, things seemed to be improving. Many in Jambaló and other Páez villages had stopped growing coca for the cartels' cocaine production and were instead harvesting quinoa for U.S.-based skincare company Zue Beauty. Then, a setback: In February, three more Páez disappeared, and the residents of Jambaló received notices on FARC letterhead saying the safety of strangers passing through the area could not be guaranteed.

“Things had been better since the government signed a peace treaty with FARC in

2016, so I'm not sure what's going on now,” says Gabriel Maya, the CEO of Zue and one of its founders. “But this is why we started the company. We want to support this community and bring about change.”

Rather than building an ethical beauty brand in typical fashion—developing products, sourcing fair-trade ingredients, and giving to philanthropic causes—Maya and his cofounders, Nathaly Millan and Felipe Maya, wanted social activism to come first. “If you change the life of the guy who grows coca,” he says, “you can slow the drug trade, and then you might end Colombia's drug war.” His first challenge: How to convince farmers not to grow coca?

Before cofounding the company, Gabriel Maya met with people in Jambaló and other Páez villages and learned they were growing small amounts of white quinoa, which sold for about 2,000 Colombian pesos (less than \$1) a pound. To survive—and often because they were coerced to do so—they also cultivated coca. Gabriel Maya figured if he could pay more for the quinoa than farmers got for coca, they would change crops. “It's not like I could ask them how much drug runners paid,” he says. “The cartels would see me as competition, and that could be really bad.” Instead, he hosted community meetings and negotiated

with locals until they settled on a price that was high enough to persuade several brave farmers to make the switch.

Just like that, Gabriel Maya was the proud owner of some really expensive quinoa. He knew if he used it to make something cheap, such as a snack bar, the company would never be profitable. So he had a chemist study the grain's skincare potential and develop a process to manufacture a cosmetic quinoa extract that can be preserved without chemicals.

The ingredient is now produced in a plant in Cali, Colombia, that is also part of the social-activism-first philosophy: The entire staff is female, and many are from the surrounding La Floresta neighborhood, which has a history of drug-related crime. The activism doesn't stop there. Zue products also have a GiveBack code on the label that lets the customer choose a cause—in Colombia, the U.S., or Canada—that benefits from a portion of the purchase price.

One close to Gabriel Maya's heart is La Mesenia Paramillo, a nature reserve that employs villagers from La Mesenia, a community deep in the forest, four hours outside Medellín. On a recent visit, he stopped by La Mesenia's school, which also receives a Zue donation. “Twenty years ago, kids here were in the middle of the war between the government military and guerillas,” he says, pointing to bullet holes on the school's exterior, barely visible beneath a coat of bright yellow paint. Today, many in La Mesenia are working for the reserve (the forest remains practically untouched by humans, and, in 2013, researchers discovered a new mammal species on the land).

“This is how a social-first company works,” Gabriel Maya says. “Sure, we make natural products that are good for you, but what we really do is help the community, so they can support themselves, which ends up helping the environment, too.” That's really how you pay it forward. —Jennifer Goldstein