

Bios

The story of the CANDELA founders is one of persistence, a deep desire to make the world a better place, and sheer grit. CANDELA began as one woman's thesis project in the '80s, developed into a nonprofit organization that assists indigenous Amazonian and Andean producers in conserving the Amazon rainforest. CANDELA has greatly improved the reputation of the Peruvian Brazil nut worldwide, led Peru to become the world's fourth largest exporter of Brazil nuts, while CANDELA is Peru's largest exporter of the nut. Over the decades, CANDELA has paid fair market prices, and given back more than \$500,000 to rural and indigenous farmers, all while providing education, childcare, healthcare assistance and more.

Lupe Lanao Flores, CANDELA Founder

Lupe Lanao Flores was born and raised in Peru. While studying at Universidad del Pacífico, Lupe worked on a thesis project that allowed Peru's indigenous people to sell handmade crafts to England. The success of the project inspired Lupe to create CANDELA Peru, a nonprofit organization that connects buyers with high demand resources through responsible channels that benefit the people and the planet. Lupe and her team went to great lengths to bootstrap CANDELA, cracking raw Brazil nuts by hand and, during the evenings, by candlelight, and eventually negotiating a loan and purchasing CANDELA's first processing plant in 1991.

Lupe stepped out of her role as CEO and into a role as a board member to pursue her MBA. After working as an independent consultant for a number of years, she returned to CANDELA Peru as CEO. Since her return, she has increased CANDELA Peru's ingredient offerings by adding products such as sacha inchi and buriti oil to their product list, began exporting ingredients to Asia and led a rebranding of the retail offerings, which now represent 15 percent of company sales. In fall 2020, she launched CANDELA Organic, a U.S.-based subsidiary of CANDELA Peru.

Lupe is considered a leader in the fair trade industry of raw nuts, and CANDELA Peru was the first organization to get organic certification by IMO Control in 2001, the first organization to create official industry standards for wild production. She is now president of APEXA, a recently formed nonprofit association of Peruvian processors and exporters of Brazil nuts. She is an active board member of [EFIDE](#), a credit union that works with small to medium businesses in Peru. She is also the Biodynamic Agriculture Peruvian Association member of [Biodynamic Federation-Demeter International](#).

Gastón Adolfo Vizcarra Kennedy, CANDELA Founder

Gastón Adolfo Vizcarra Kennedy is an economist who has spent more than 30 years developing strategies for sustainable use of the Amazon rainforest and other fragile ecosystems, promoting ethical trade for non-timber forest products ([NTFPs](#)), and advocating for the sustainable use of Amazon ecosystems, while also generating income for local and native communities.

Gastón is a founding member of CANDELA Peru and was CEO from 1994-2010, helping to land major clients such as The Body Shop and Subway. Throughout his tenure, Gaston led CANDELA Peru's first reforestation program through the planting and selling of Brazil nut crops, created new processes to further support their producers, and helped to found the Union for Ethical BioTrade (UEBT) in 2007.

As current president of CANDELA Peru, Gastón is working with Lupe and their leadership team to launch a subsidiary, CANDELA Organic, in the U.S., providing high quality, high demand natural and organic butters and oils from Peru, including Brazil nut oil, passion fruit seed oil, murumuru butter, buriti oil and cupuaçu butter, to the personal care industry. CANDELA Organic further cements his reputation as a pioneer in the export of Peruvian natural and wild harvested products, and as a trailblazer in bringing these types of products to the Americas, Europe, Oceania and Asia.

Gastón has served on the boards of the World Fair Trade Organization and the Peruvian Institute of Natural Products and Ecology (IPPN). He is currently a board member of Union for Ethical BioTrade and the Center for Technological Innovation of Madre de Dios – Peru.

Patricia Leon Melgar, CANDELA Organic Vice President of Sales and Marketing U.S.

Patricia Leon-Melgar has three decades of experience working in the environmental sector, with a deep passion for improving rural communities' quality of life through sustainable economic development.

Prior to launching CANDELA Organic in the U.S., a subsidiary of CANDELA Peru, Patricia was the CEO of WWF Peru beginning in 2011. Highlights of her seven year tenure at WWF in Peru include the early implementation of the Peru-Norway agreement to reduce emissions from deforestation; launching the Dedicated Grant Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples (DGM) of the World Bank; and working in conjunction with indigenous federations, the Peru government and international supporters to expand titling of indigenous lands in the Amazon.

While living on the Pacific Islands, Patricia was a founding member and director of the SIUL: Institute for Sustainable Living in the Republic of Palau. She was also Director of "Compatible Economic Development" at The Nature Conservancy, where she designed and launched "EcoEnterprises Fund" – a successful venture capital fund that fosters sustainable development in fragile ecosystems through impact investment.

Through CANDELA Organic, Patricia is introducing highly-quality natural and organic oils and butters to the U.S. market, which in turn connects indigenous Amazonian and Andean producers to fair markets, continuing her life's commitment.