

Transforming Tradition: Kumaon Tea Unveils Revolutionary Model for Indian Tea Production

High-elevation single-origin tea collection from forgotten tea region is regeneratively grown and supports economic resiliency

MARQUETTE, MICHIGAN, UNITED STATES, February 21, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Kumaon Tea](#), a trailblazing partnership between smallholder farmers in the Kumaon region of the Indian Himalayas and U.S.-based [Young Mountain Tea](#) (YMT), has broken ground on the first-of-its-kind tea factory, and will be offering four premium organic teas for sale through YMT starting in September.



Kumaon Indian Tea Farmers 2

Kumaon Tea shifts the ownership of tea factories from large entities into the hands of rural, smallholder farmers. This transformative approach is a groundbreaking departure from the industry's colonial legacy that has prevailed for centuries, ushering in a new era of economic resiliency and autonomy for the local farmers.

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YMT Founder Raj Vable

“The Indian tea industry was set up in the mid-1800s by the British, for the British,” said Kumaon Tea Co-Founder Raj Vable. “Indian tea farmers didn’t own any aspect of the trade - the land, the tea factories, not even their own homes. The legacy of this colonial origin still impacts

farmers’ lives today.” He added: “Kumaon Tea is set to redefine the Indian tea industry through a commitment to farmer equity, regenerative agricultural practices, and world class teas.”

Kumaon Tea's collection of black, white and green teas offers bright, complex flavors and premium quality, similar to the best teas coming from Darjeeling, India's most prized tea region. Kumaon tea grows at 4,000-6,000 feet above sea level, and the high elevation contributes to the distinctive flavor profile of the tea, as cooler temperatures allow stronger flavors to develop thanks to slower growth and beneficial environmental stressors. The 170-year-old heritage Kumaon tea bushes—some of the oldest in India—create a phenomenal product with strong, deep floral flavors bursting with freshness that far surpasses the flat, one-note black tea to which most tea drinkers are limited.

In 2013, Raj, a first-generation Indian-American on a Fulbright fellowship in Kumaon, saw first-hand the mass urban migration and deserted rural towns. The once-rich farmland was becoming unstable due to being overworked, which was affecting the villagers' ability to grow crops and support themselves. Recognizing an opportunity, Raj founded YMT to connect Kumaon's farmers with the thriving U.S. specialty tea market, allowing the farmers to revive their tea gardens and the soil, creating a sustainable path for economic growth.

In this vein, for the past decade the YMT team has been working with Kumaon farmers and international partners to establish a new ownership structure. In January 2024, they broke ground on a new, state-of-the-art, Food Safety Modernization Act-compliant tea factory. This joint venture that's both farmer-owned and internationally supported, will produce its first batch of regeneratively grown teas in spring 2024, with the samples available in June 2024 and bulk teas arriving in the U.S. for sale by September 2024.



Raj Vable Headshot



Kumaon Tea tea

Kumaon Tea's farmers (90 percent of whom are women) will be able to earn five times commodity rates for their harvest and will receive additional income through their collective ownership in the factory. With Kumaon Tea, farmers own the land as well as the factory, and they are being taught how to build a successful business, paving the way for their future financial autonomy. The farmers are also taught regenerative farming practices – from no-till practices to understanding soil health – in order to ensure the region's longevity for generations to come.

The project has received funding from local and international partners, including the USAID Cooperative Development Program, Frontier Co-op, Acumen, YMT, and Desmond Birkbeck, a multi-generational Kumaon tea farmer who has been the project's primary on-the-ground champion and investor.

About Kumaon Tea:

Kumaon Tea is a pioneering partnership between smallholder farmers in the Kumaon region of north India, Young Mountain Tea and a number of international partners. Kumaon Tea puts the ownership of tea factories and the land to the hands of hundreds of rural, smallholder farmers in the Kumaon region of the Himalayas. Committed to sustainable practices and economic empowerment, Kumaon Tea is set to redefine the Indian tea industry. This joint venture will produce its first batch of regeneratively grown teas in spring 2024, with four styles of loose leaf teas arriving in the U.S. for sale by September 2024. Support comes from USAID, Frontier Co-op, Acumen, YMT, and other private partners.

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