



## **Yolélé and Woodland Foods Announce Licensing Partnership for West African Fonio Products**

**BROOKLYN, N.Y. and WAUKEGAN, Ill. (June 24, 2019)** – Yolélé, a revolutionary African food brand, and Woodland Foods, premier importer and supplier of over 1,600 specialty dried ingredients, announced today a long-term licensing partnership to distribute West African fonio products under the Yolélé brand to foodservice operators and retailers.

The agreement, which includes single-ingredient fonio products and seasoned fonio blends, will combine sustainable sourcing of fonio in West African countries with strategic North American distribution, giving consumers and food service operations unprecedented access to the ancient West African grain. Additionally, the commitment will create future opportunities for introducing other natural African ingredients to North American consumers.

Fonio has been the subject of much industry attention in recent years, thanks in large part to the efforts of Yolélé co-founder Chef Pierre Thiam. In 2017, Thiam delivered a TED Talk on fonio which has received over one million views. His second cookbook on the cuisine of Senegal was nominated for a James Beard award. Bloomberg recently named fonio a "super grain" thanks to its superior nutritional profile. Fonio is gluten-free and contains three times the amount of fiber and four times the amount of protein as brown rice. It is rich in amino acids typically lacking in grains, and boasts a low-glycemic index, presenting a host of beneficial possibilities for health-conscious and gluten-free market segments.

Fonio is a traditional crop in West Africa, where it has been cultivated for over 5,000 years. As climate change continues to exacerbate problems of soil degradation and drought in the regions where it is grown, fonio's resurgence represents sustainable economic opportunity for struggling farmers, mainly women. Fonio is drought-tolerant, can be harvested multiple times per year and produces a root system which helps fight soil erosion.

Woodland Foods COO Aram Karapetian explains, "Our sourcing capabilities are strengthened as we integrate our supply chain expertise with the knowledge of the Yolélé team, who are intimately familiar with the citizens and conditions of the region and who have established partnerships with various NGOs, trade, and government partners. This partnership represents a direct investment in farming communities, allowing us to maintain product integrity while preserving the mission of the brand."

"Partnering with Woodland Foods allows us to achieve so much more than we could on our own," says Yolélé co-founder Pierre Thiam. "Their strengths in logistics, compliance, distribution, and customer service bring our business goals within reach, and help immeasurably in achieving our purpose: to bring Africa's culinary treasures to a wider audience in a way that benefits the continent's rural communities and strengthens its long-term resilience."

**WOODLANDFOODS.COM | P: (847)-625-8600 | F: (847) 625-5050**

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The agreement will go into effect at the end of July 2019. For more information about Yolélé Foods, please visit [YoleleFoods.com](http://YoleleFoods.com). To learn more about Woodland Foods, visit [WoodlandFoods.com](http://WoodlandFoods.com).

**ABOUT YOLÉLÉ** Yolélé was co-founded by industry veteran Philip Teverow and Pierre Thiam, award-winning chef, cookbook author and restaurateur, global ambassador for African cuisine and culture, and longtime advocate for sustainability and biodiversity. He recently opened Teranga, a West African restaurant in Harlem, to much acclaim. Yolélé's mission is to create economic opportunity for smallholder farming communities, promote regenerative farming systems, and introduce Africa's rich and bountiful ingredients to tables around the world. Learn more at [YoleleFoods.com](http://YoleleFoods.com) and follow @yolelefoods on Instagram and Facebook.

**ABOUT WOODLAND FOODS** Woodland Foods is the premier importer and supplier of more than 1,600 specialty natural ingredients. Woodland Foods specializes in product innovation and providing unique food choices through global sourcing, custom processing, and convenience. For more information, please call 847-505-7800, e-mail [press@woodlandfoods.com](mailto:press@woodlandfoods.com) or visit [www.woodlandfoods.com](http://www.woodlandfoods.com).

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