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Cacao for Peace - Strengthening the Colombian Cacao Extension System

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Report Highlights:

On January 15, 2016, USDA-FAS signed a Participating Agency Program Agreement (PAPA) with USAID entitled Cacao for Peace (CfP). The overall goal of the CfP is to help make Colombia a world leader in cacao production. To help achieve this goal the project aims at strengthening Colombia's key cacao public and private institutions in four areas: 1) extension; 2) education; 3) research; and 4) technical assistance. This report highlights the main achievements during the first year of strengthening the cacao extension system.

This is a follow-up report to our GAIN report "Cacao for Peace (CFP) Overview" of July 29, 2016.

General Information:

The overall goal of Cacao for Peace is to help make Colombia a world leader in cacao production. Achieving this goal would create a productive alternative for Colombian farmers to substitute from the cultivation of illicit crops and provide the multi-billion dollar U.S. chocolate industry new and reliable suppliers of cacao outside of West Africa. The project would also provide a boost to the rural economy of Colombia, benefit the environment, and help the peace process. To attain our overall goal, Cacao for Peace aims to strengthen Colombia's key cacao public and private institutions in four areas: 1) extension; 2) education; 3) research; and 4) technical assistance.

To develop outstanding business practices for the project, we are beginning in the eight departments that make up the Colombian Caribbean region. In subsequent years, the project will begin to expand to other parts of the country. We chose the region because the Caribbean has a developing cacao industry with unique varieties, key partners such as Red Cacaotera (Cacao Producer Association Network), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Peace Corps work in the area, and the Caribbean has three major ports for exports. As a pilot for CfP extension activities, we selected Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (SNSM), a region in the Magdalena Department of the Caribbean. Farmers in this region lack the technical knowledge and business strategies to build sustainable cacao farms, have limited access to trained educators, and greatly need technical assistance.

CfP Extension Educators Network Workshop

As a first step in the process, CfP implementers at Penn State University (PSU), in coordination with FAS/Bogota, organized the first CfP Colombian Cacao Extension Educators Network workshop. The main objectives were: to create a functional network of the CfP extension partners; to inventory the partner's training materials and farmer assistance efforts; and to create strategies and an action plan for coordinated efforts among the CfP extension partners.

The workshop was held in Bogota in July, 2016. The meeting was attended by representatives of all the major organizations that provide extension and technical assistance to cacao farmers in Colombia including: Colombian Corporation for Agricultural Research (CORPOICA), Colombian National Learning Service (SENA), Colombian Cacao Growers Federation (FEDECACAO), Red Cacaotera, Cacao de Colombia, Swiss Contact, UNODC and representatives from USAID, FAS/Bogota, PSU and Purdue University.

The general consensus of the participants was that there is a pressing need for farmer education in the cacao sector and for coordination among the groups providing farmer training and education.



Cacao for Peace extension network session.

The main outcomes of the workshop was a commitment by the participants to work with Cacao for Peace to conduct a survey to determine a baseline of cacao production in the CfP project areas and to contribute in the establishment of CfP innovation farms. Participants also agreed to set-up the first CfP Bootcamp to provide training for farmers who are working on the CfP.

CfP Bootcamp: Training the Trainers

CfP implementers at PSU and FAS/Bogota, in partnership with Peace Corps/Colombia, UNODC and FEDECACAO, organized the first CfP Bootcamp that took place in November, 2016 in Santander and SNSM. This activity provided comprehensive cacao training to farmers and Peace Corps Volunteers. The training was conducted in Santander by FEDECACAO and PSU and was attended by three Peace Corp Volunteers and ten farmer-leaders from SNSM.



Cacao for Peace Bootcamp training and Peace Corp Volunteers receiving their diplomas.

The following week, direct farmer-training was conducted in three SNSM farming communities supported by CfP. The training topics were selected by the communities (pruning, post-harvest practices and pest and disease control) and were organized and conducted by the recently trained Bootcamp participants.

In total, 101 farmers were trained, including representatives from indigenous communities (Arhuacos, Koguis). Representatives of CORPOICA and SENA also participated in the training. The enthusiastic response of the participants confirmed that there is a great need and demand for further extension and farmer training. The CfP partners will continue working to develop innovation farms that will be used as continuous extension education platforms to help farmers from the Caribbean region.