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**PennState**  
College of Agricultural Sciences

Program in the Molecular Biology of Cacao



## Building Extension Education Capacity in Colombia: Cacao for Peace Bootcamp



**FEDERACION NACIONAL DE CACAOTEROS**



Peace Corp Volunteers receiving CFP Bootcamp Certificates upon completion of training in cacao production techniques.

### Challenge

In 2015, the USAID identified a need in Colombia for strengthening of the extension capacity related to cacao, an important alternative crop for coca, grown in areas highly impacted by violence. Farmer education is critical to rebuild the knowledge base lost in over 53 years of conflict. Enhanced farmer knowledge will help to improve productivity, quality and sustainability of this important crop. Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta (SNSM), an important region of the northern coast of Colombia that is characterized by a large mountain range surrounded by highly bio-diverse forests sloping to the Caribbean Sea. This area has suffered from many years of narcotics production, trafficking and associated violence, affecting the lives of thousands of local and indigenous populations. Many farmers in this region have started the transition to cacao farming as a legal alternative to coca, but they often lack the technical knowledge and business strategies to build sustainable cacao farms. The farmers in this region have limited access to trained educators and greatly needed technical assistance.

### Initiative

In 2016, USAID signed a Participating Agency Program Agreement with USDA-FAS to strengthen Colombia's key public and private institutions involved with cooperative research, technical assistance and extension education the cacao sector (Cacao for Peace – CFP). The overall goal of this project is to improve rural well-being through agricultural development focused on improving cacao farmers' income, economic opportunity, stability and peace. A component of the project includes providing access to technical knowledge to the farmers on a regular basis and direct technical training of farmers. The first step in achieving this goal was to conduct a workshop with community based trainers followed by farmer training. CFP implementers at Penn State University (PSU) together with partners from Peace Corps Colombia, UNODC and FEDECACAO, worked with USDA-FAS to organize the first CFP Bootcamp to provide basic training to Peace Corp Volunteers and farmer-leaders living in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta region and the first CFP cacao farmer training.

### Results

The Bootcamp was held in November of 2016. The trainers's training was conducted in Santander by FEDECACAO and PSU and was attended by three Peace Corp Volunteers and 8 farmer-leaders from SNSM. 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 about 101 farmers were trained, including ethnic communities (Arhuacos, Koguis) women, young adults and several teenagers, indicating that cacao production truly involves all facets of the social structure in this region. Representatives of CORPOICA and SENA also participated. All participants received certificates for their training. The enthusiastic response of the participants confirmed that there is a great need and demand for further extension and farmer training in the region. The CFP partners will continue to work to develop demonstration farms that will be used as continuous extension education platforms to help farmers in this region.



Training the trainers: FEDECACAO workshop on cacao pruning presented during the Bootcamp.



Training the farmers: Bootcamp participants spanning gender, generational and cultural diversity.