

Fulbright and Colfuturo Scholars Work to Build a Bright Future for Cacao in Colombia



Challenge Colombia's rural development was undercut by a decades long conflict between the Colombian national government and armed revolutionary groups. The area has suffered from narcotics production, drug trafficking, and the associated violence. Farmers in these regions could use assistance to improve their technical knowledge, business strategies, and training that has been lost due to nearly 50 years of conflict.

Initiative In 2016 the Colombian government and FARC signed a peace treaty, which in part seeks to improve rural development. In accordance with U.S. agricultural interest and to promote peace in Colombia, USAID and USDA signed a participating agency program agreement to launch **"Cacao for Peace" (CfP)**, a 5 years long 5-million-dollar initiative that seeks to increase cacao yields, increase cacao farmer incomes, and contribute to rural stability and peace in Colombia. CfP partnered with Fulbright Colombia, Colfuturo (a Colombian non-profit that promotes post-graduate degrees) and U.S. land-grant universities Penn State and Purdue to enhance educational opportunities for Colombian cacao researchers. The partnership fully funded four Fulbright and three Colfuturo scholars to receive Master of Science and Ph.D. degrees in the U.S. The scholars graduate research topics are aligned with the main CfP objectives. Upon completing their studies, the scholars will return to Colombia to support the development of the cacao sector. At both Penn State and Purdue, the scholars are working with top researchers. Penn State has had ongoing

research and training programs related to cacao for more than 50 years. At Purdue University the Colfuturo scholars are working with top agricultural engineering and plant biology researchers. All seven students have research grants that allow them to study cultivation and social issues challenging Colombia's cacao sector such as low production, plant pathogens, cadmium accumulation, and insufficient extension services.

Results In addition to the CfP support, the researchers at Penn State University received additional support from Fulbright Colombia

(fellowships in the amount of \$293,000) and from Penn State (tuition waivers in the amount of \$310,000). The four students are generating ground-breaking research on cacao diseases, cadmium remediation materials, cacao extension, and cacao development assistance. The students completed their master's degrees in August of 2019. **Penn**

State has committed \$530,000 of new support for three of the CfP graduates to continue with their PhD studies. At Purdue University three CfP-Colfuturo scholarship recipients are expected to receive their master's degrees by December of 2020. Purdue has waived \$89,460 in tuition for the Colfuturo scholars. Research topics include: investigating how to improve Colombian cocoa powder performance and stability, cocoa extension for the retainment of youth in rural areas, and microbiological methods for reducing cadmium uptake by cacao. Two of the scholars will continue to pursue PhD's at Purdue.



CfP Scholar at Purdue University, María Zea digesting plant material in preparation for quantifying cadmium.