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PennState
College of Agricultural Sciences

Program in the Molecular Biology of Cacao

Building Leadership Capacity in Colombia: Cochran Program Technical Training Workshop Best Practices for Harvest and Post-Harvest of Cacao



Cochran Workshop participants meet with members of the Hershey Foods Sustainability Team.

Challenge

In 2015, USAID identified a need in Colombia for strengthening of the cacao value chain to provide support to the development of cacao as an important alternative crop for coca and to promote market access for cacao farmers. To support these objectives, there is need to increase the technical knowledge of all stakeholders in the Colombian cacao community and to promote increased communication and collaboration between its members.

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 sub-goal was defined to promote the educational development of industry and government leaders through technical training in a cross-disciplinary array of topics relating the cacao value chain. To address this goal, USAID CfP Project partnered with the USDA Cochran program and Penn State University to develop a two-week training workshop. The program was designed to provide theoretical and hands-on training in all aspects of the value chain from cultivation to product marketing, chocolate production and sensory evaluation.



Chocolate Manufacturing 101 by Dr. Greg Zeigler at Penn State University, Department of Food Sciences Pilot Plant.

Results

With the support of USAID, and with the management of USDA-FAS, The Cochran Cacao Workshop was developed by Penn State University and held Jan. 16th-28th with the participation of 6 fellows selected from industry and government sectors of Colombia and Ecuador. The workshop included visits to the World Cocoa Foundation, the National Confectionary Association and scientists at the USDA ARS cacao research program in Washington DC. A series of lectures and hands on sessions at Penn State University in cacao plant science, chocolate manufacturing and sensory analysis were presented. The Fellows also visited Hershey Foods, met the Hershey Sustainability team and toured the manufacturing facilities. Participants spent a second week training with Ricardo Goenega Director of the USDA ARS Tropical Research Station in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. Dr Goenega and his staff provided a Master Class covering the science and management of operating a cacao research field station and laboratory facility. The program enhanced trade linkages between the U.S. and South American companies through visits and networking with US researchers and industry representatives.



Participants visiting the USDA ARS Beltsville Research Station on Jan 17th, 2017. (All photos M. Guiltinan)