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## Analysis of the specialty cocoa value chain in Huila, Colombia

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### Abstract

Colombia is a country with a high potential to produce specialty cocoa, but with low export volumes compared to regular cocoa. To enhance the potential of cocoa exports, the Cacao Más Sostenible projects aim at supporting cocoa farmers in Huila, the 5th largest exporter of fine flavour cocoa worldwide. The goal of this study is to analyse trends in specialty cocoa in the European and Swiss markets and the upstream potential of the cocoa value chain in Huila: nurseries, cocoa farmers, and producer associations. The methods used were literature research and quantitative and qualitative research, including stakeholder interviews and farmer surveys. European markets, especially the Swiss market, are showing great interest in the trade of sustainable specialty cocoa. Organic and Fairtrade certifications are important for targeting this specific niche market. Results indicate that nurseries have good production capacities but gaps in traceability due to a lack of formality. Good agricultural practices (GAP) could be adopted to overcome it. Most cocoa farmers do not fill all GAP. Smaller farms have more sustainable practices than larger ones. GAPs identified are the use of organic fertilizers and mechanical weeding whereas practices which still need to be improved are the use of chemical fertilizers, fungicides, and insecticides. The assessment of sustainable practices at the farm level indicates that there are weaknesses which need to be improved. As for the producer associations, no sustainable environmental practices could be identified, only social sustainability practices such as gender equity that is mostly respected through the integration of women on the boards of directors. In terms of integration into the European and Swiss markets, there are still gaps in terms of the necessary formalities to follow food safety, traceability, and hygiene protocols. It is important to highlight that there are common problems in the farmer and association segments: the ageing of cocoa farmers and the low number of young people willing to continue farming, climate change is another factor affecting production. There is a need to anticipate the repercussions by developing varieties adapted to climate change, pests and with specialty cocoa organoleptic profiles.

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