



cacao CO-OP PROFILE

# COCABO CO-OP

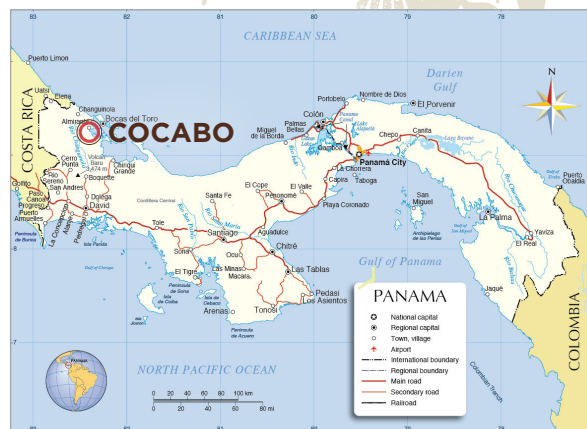
SMALL FARMER  
GROWN



COCABO member Gilberto Bonilla receiving a Panama Extra Dark 80% chocolate bar from Dary Goodrich, Equal Exchange's Chocolate Products Manager, during a tour of Gilberto's farm.

## What makes this co-op special?

COCABO is an organization of 1,500 small-scale cacao farmers located in the Bocas del Toro Province of Panama. 95% of COCABO's members are indigenous with most members being from the Ngöbe-Buglé people. Founded in 1952, it is the oldest cooperative in Panama. Along with marketing cacao and implementing Fair Trade projects in local communities, the co-operative supports its members through technical assistance to increase crop yields and quality. The organization has diversified its business through sales of bananas and wood, and they now have a small chocolate shop near their main office. Located near the Amistad International Park, the largest nature reserve in Central America and a UNESCO World Heritage site, COCABO has a strong environmental focus and offers crucial support for economic and community development through alternatives to traditional economic activities that have often led to deforestation in this critical habitat.



COCABO's main office is located in Almirante, a small port city located on the Caribbean coast of Panama.

## Relationship between Equal Exchange and Co-op

### Commercial Collaboration:

**YEARS OF RELATIONSHIP:** 11 years

### EE PRODUCTS:

- 80g Bar: Panama Extra Dark Chocolate 80%

**ANNUAL PURCHASE VOLUME:** 50 Metric Tons/Year

### Non-Commercial Collaboration:

- VISITS TO PANAMA:** 2008, 2012, 2015, 2019

## Farmer Data

<b>NUMBER OF MEMBERS:</b>	1,500
<b>AVERAGE PRODUCER AGE:</b>	50-70
<b>GENDER:</b>	70% men, 30% women
<b>AVERAGE FARM SIZE:</b>	3 hectares
<b>AVERAGE FARM PRODUCTIVITY:</b>	125 kilos of dry cacao per hectare
<b>AVERAGE ANNUAL (NET) INCOME:</b>	\$990

## Co-op Data

<b>CO-OP NAME:</b>	Multi-Service Cocoa Cooperative of Bocatoreña
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Panama
<b>FOUNDED IN:</b>	1952
<b>CURRENT GENERAL MANAGER:</b>	Gilberto Blanford
<b>CO-OP PRODUCTS:</b>	Cocoa, Bananas, Wood
<b>PRODUCT VOLUMES:</b>	225 MT
<b>CERTIFICATIONS:</b>	Fair Trade, Organic
<b>WEBSITE:</b>	<a href="http://www.cocabo.org">www.cocabo.org</a>
<b>FACEBOOK:</b>	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Cocabo-RL-356266454423499">facebook.com/Cocabo-RL-356266454423499</a>

### Mission:

To promote social, cultural, economic, and environmental development of its members through the diversification of agricultural, commercial and educational activities.





## FARMER PROFILES/STORIES



### Nilka Sanchez

Nilka has been a member of COCABO for over 10 years and grows cacao on 1 hectare of land near her house. She is a member of the Naso people, which is an indigenous group in Panama with about 2,500–3,500 members. She is

part of a women's group that has received outside funding for an ecotourism project. Through the project, they have built a large kitchen and dining area for meals and events, and they have a cabin with various sleeping arrangements for small or large groups. You can learn more about the project at [posadamedialuna.com](http://posadamedialuna.com).



### Andrés Jiménez

Andrés is an artisan woodworker who ended up taking over the farm after his father died. He farms on 2 hectares in the community of Bonyic, which is part of La Amistad International Park. Andrés would like people in the US to

know that life is not easy for people in the Panamanian countryside and that there needs to be investment, but often resources are inadequate. Despite these challenges, they progress, and through cacao farming they protect and work together with the natural environment.



### Manuel Palacio

Manuel has worked at COCABO for over 22 years and recently became their head agronomist. In this job, he oversees both certification processes and farm projects for the members. Manuel is currently on the board of the

Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fair Trade Small Producers and Workers (CLAC), which is the fair trade network of Latin American farmer organizations. His team is working on various productivity projects including on-farm projects as well as the creation of clonal gardens to make farming more impactful for COCABO's members.

### What makes the relationship between EE and this co-op special?

Equal Exchange is the only US company selling chocolate made with cacao beans from Panama. Since the launch of our Panama single origin bar in 2008, this has become our best selling chocolate product and we have been able to share COCABO's story with millions of Americans and help build a market for COCABO's beans. This has meant the purchase of roughly 400MT of beans over the life of our relationship.

One reason we are excited to work with COCABO is that they have the most robust agroforestry model of any of our partners. Many of their farmers grow cacao in a truly integrated way under the forest canopy, resulting in numerous environmental benefits. On the downside, this model means productivity on the farms is far lower than any of our other partners. This lower productivity leads to low incomes. For this reason COCABO receives a higher price than any of our other partners. Despite the higher price, members can still struggle to make a living with the low yields and the cooperative has several projects to improve productivity to overcome this challenge.



*Cacao trees growing under an agroforestry model near the community of Bonyic, Panama.*



### Equal Exchange products with cacao from COCABO:



Organic Panama  
Extra Dark Chocolate  
(80% Cacao)