

# Fair Trade Certified Chocolate Campaign

## Fair Trade Cocoa Farmers in the Dominican Republic: Conacado

### The Conacado cooperative

The Dominican Republic is the home of the Conacado cooperative, which was founded in 1988, and joined the Fair Trade system in 1995. The Dominican Republic's tourism industry has increased significantly in recent years but this has not helped small farmers in the inner part of the country, many of whom are still struggling to survive. Even most of Conacado's small-scale farmers must also work on bigger plantations because their cocoa revenues do not meet their needs. As a result, farmers are limited in the time and money they can direct towards their own crops.

Conacado has about 9,000 members, who belong to 126 smaller cooperatives that are organized into regional groups called "bloques." Each bloque differs according to member needs, though each has a Board, Assemblies and Producer Committees. Each bloque also organizes exchange visits and workshops focused on agricultural and administrative topics. Local and national staff work with the Producer Committees to develop annual work plans, organize special activities, and evaluate loans. Conacado's goals are to generate work and income for disadvantaged groups, increase quality and productivity, foster direct trade relationships, and provide credit and technical assistance.



### Cocoa production in Conacado

Cocoa accounts for 90% of the income members receive through Conacado. Other commodities such as bananas, citric fruits, potatoes, other vegetables and coffee are also produced for the local market and home consumption. Most of Conacado's cocoa has always been organic and shade grown. The cooperative is working to help farmers improve and expand these methods so that all cocoa will be certified organic. Fair Trade provides added support for farming methods that are safe for the environment and public health by encouraging shade cultivation, composting, and minimization of

chemical inputs, and offering a higher price for organic cocoa.

The country's tropical maritime climate offers the perfect growing conditions for cocoa but also presents the constant threat of heavy weather influences, with more than one hurricane passing close by the island or hitting it each autumn. Farmers across the Dominican Republic were devastated in 1998 when Hurricane George destroyed countless acres of many important agricultural products, including the majority of cocoa plants and shade trees. The Dominican government had very limited funding for these farmers, most of whom do not have savings and face extreme difficulty securing loans. Commodity prices in the world economy just aren't high enough to support much more than day to day survival.

Fortunately the picture is a little brighter for Conacado's farmers because Fair Trade ensures a minimum price of \$.80/pound under long-term contracts, access to credit, and prohibits abusive child labor and forced labor. Fair Trade farmers are required to reserve a portion of their revenues for social projects, ensuring that community development and technical training for farmers will always be possible. Fair Trade sales have provided the cooperative with enough income to meet basic expenses and invest in the future. After Hurricane George, the importance of Fair Trade revenues

was clear. Isidoro de la Rosa, the director of Conacado, explains: "With the Fairtrade premium of 1999, we had planned to build some important roads, but with Hurricane George, which destroyed many of the farms and reduced our production with 70%, the General Assembly of members decided to use this money to 'clean up' the damaged farms and to create nurseries for new planting material."

Conacado's capacity for production has improved since its incorporation but remains at the mercy of tropical weather patterns. As a result of Hurricane George, total

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## Fair Trade Cocoa Farmers in the Dominican Republic (continued)

cocoa production dropped from 5,799 tons in 1998 to 1,912 tons in 1999 while total exports dropped from 3,724 tons to 1,555 tons across this time. On the positive side, Fair Trade sales rose from 88 tons in 1998 to 234 tons in 1999.

### Benefits of Fair Trade

Fair Trade has helped Conacado's farmers in many important ways in addition to supporting rebuilding after Hurricane George. The cooperative has organized workshops to teach farmers how to improve fermentation techniques, expand sustainable growing methods, increase productivity, and participate more actively in the cooperative. In addition to these programs, Conacado facilitates many other projects, some with funding from other NGO's. One example is the Juntas Mujeres Campesinas, which is a group of three women's organizations that oversee the production of wine, bread, liquor, jam, chocolate and organic fertilizers.

Isidoro has expressed just how much the cooperative and Fair Trade system have offered to farmers and their communities: "In our country there was no tradition of fermenting cocoa. With the Fairtrade income, we were able to implement a fermentation programme to improve the quality and to convert our production to certified organic. This improved our position in the export-market. These days the competition for small-scale farmers organizations has become very aggressive, so only niche markets allow us to survive."

### Future plans for Conacado

For Conacado, Fair Trade has paved the way for renewal, and continues to be a foundation of hope for continued growth. However, Conacado's members still sell much of their cocoa in the conventional market where prices have been below the cost of production for over two years. "We would like to see the Fairtrade sales increase to improve our market position," says Isidoro. Farmer incomes are sufficient to cover the ba-

sic costs of living but do not leave room for savings or extra expenses such as home improvements. Families with especially large numbers of children still can't afford to send them all to school. In addition, as late as 2000 many cocoa gardens were still covered with dense weeds, awaiting the funds for replanting.

Increased consumer demand is the key that will open up the Fair Trade market and bring Conacado's members the additional Fair Trade revenues they need so much. By buying Fair Trade chocolate and advocating for it in your local community and beyond, you can help build the Fair Trade market and ensure that chocolate is as sweet for the farmers as it is for you. See the following resources to learn more and get started today!



### RESOURCES

#### *These companies use cocoa from Conacado*

Equal Exchange  
[www.equalexchange.com](http://www.equalexchange.com)  
[info@equalexchange.com](mailto:info@equalexchange.com)  
781-830-0303

Dagoba Organic Chocolate  
[www.dagobachocolate.com](http://www.dagobachocolate.com)

La Siembra Cooperative  
[info@lasiembra.com](mailto:info@lasiembra.com)  
[www.lasiembra.com](http://www.lasiembra.com)

Traidcraft  
[www.traidcraft.co.uk](http://www.traidcraft.co.uk)

#### *Get involved & learn more!*

Global Exchange Fair Trade Chocolate Campaign  
415-575-5538  
[melissa@globalexchange.org](mailto:melissa@globalexchange.org)  
[www.globalexchange.org/cocoa](http://www.globalexchange.org/cocoa)

Fair Trade Foundation UK  
[www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)

Fair Trade Labeling Organizations International  
[www.fairtrade.net](http://www.fairtrade.net)

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