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The 2021 Cocoa of Excellence Awards winners!

Celebrating and Rewarding Excellence in Producing High-quality Cocoa Origins

COCOA OF EXCELLENCE, ROME, ITALY (16 December 2021) – Following a selection and evaluation process of 235 cocoa samples submitted from 53 origins, the 50 entrants shortlisted for the 2021 Edition of the Cocoa of Excellence Awards waited with anticipation to hear the results. Read on to find out who the Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards winners are and why these awards matter for the future of our chocolate supply.

On 16 December 2021 during a virtual ceremony broadcast to more than 70 countries, the 2021 Cocoa of Excellence Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards winners were celebrated, shining the international spotlight on the work of cocoa farmers, and the diversity of cocoa around the world.

[Cocoa of Excellence](#) proudly recognizes quality, flavour and diversity of cocoas from origins around the world to improve farmers' livelihoods and drive sustainability of the cocoa supply chain since 2009. Its vision is Excellence in the cocoa sector catalysing multiple benefits for resilient and thriving agricultural systems at landscape and global level.

Cocoa of Excellence takes a big step forward into its second decade with the first Cocoa of Excellence Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards while acknowledging the legacy of our past Editions with the International Cocoa Awards. The next decade will be exciting as we work together to continue to promote diversity and strive for superior quality cocoa. Of course central to all of that are the women and men, the families, cooperatives and communities in origins across the world who grow these cocoa. Brigitte Laliberté, Acting Director, Cocoa of Excellence, Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT.

Cocoa of Excellence works to increase awareness and promote education along the cocoa supply chain about the opportunities to produce high quality cocoa and the need to preserve flavours resulting from genetic diversity, the terroir and the know-how of the farmers who prepare cocoa. Cocoa of Excellence is a unique international initiative that celebrates and values the work of the cocoa farmers. They are the ones recognized and celebrated at the international level.

For this 2021 Edition, Cocoa of Excellence received 235 samples of cocoa beans, from 53 origins across the four cocoa-producing regions. After a detailed physical quality evaluation, the beans were carefully processed into liquor for blind sensory evaluation by the [Cocoa of Excellence Technical Committee](#), a panel of international cocoa and chocolate experts. Following a robust data analysis, the Best 50 samples were selected and processed into a dark chocolate (following the same recipe of 66% cocoa) for sensory evaluation by the [2021 Edition Jury](#). This jury of 39 experts included the members of the Technical Committee and additional experts from a broad range of professions from chocolatiers, to sensory evaluation experts, to bean sourcers from 12 countries across Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas.

Jury members this year were impressed by the range of flavours across the 235 samples. “One of the most important things and which I like the most is to discover so much flavour diversity in each cocoa sample. There’s not one which is the same to another. And it takes training to be able to recognize that all. But in the end you have the impression to travel the world,” said Julien Simonis, Cocoa of Excellence Technical Committee member. “The 2021 Edition is for me the most accomplished in terms of diversity,” said Florent Coste, Valrhona, Cocoa of Excellence Technical Committee member.

The 2021 Edition also marks the last edition that the processing of the cocoa bean samples into liquor will be overseen by the chair of the Technical Committee and co-founder of Cocoa of Excellence, Ed Seguine, of Seguine Cacao Cocoa and Chocolate Advisers and Guittard Chocolate. Ed has spent fifty years devoting himself to encouraging and promoting quality cocoa and the producers who grow it. For Ed the farmers and their families are the heart of the cocoa sector: “When we celebrate the fine flavours that are produced in origins all over the world and all farmers of the world, we are celebrating the passion, the joy and the history of the farmers behind them.”

For many participating cocoa producers, recognition from Cocoa of Excellence by being selected as part of the Best 50 and winning an Award validates not just their own work but the work of the generations who came before. Cocoa farming is often a family business. Philippines producer and 2021 Gold Award winner, Arthur Lagoc is a second generation cocoa farmer who inherited the family cocoa farm from his father Juan Lagoc. “It is a pride and honour to the family to be recognised internationally. Especially to my father,” he said.

The producers who win a Cocoa of Excellence Award can play a strong role of cocoa quality champion in their communities. Many participants have mentioned the importance of supporting and encouraging their fellow cocoa producers: “I participate in Cocoa of Excellence because I want to promote cocoa beans from Malaysia that have speciality in fine flavour. I believe that it will give me more insight about cocoa and to share my knowledge to other farmers and encourage them to grow more cocoa because cocoa is a good business,” said Poimon Dangkat, Sabah, Malaysia, 2021 Gold Award winner.

This encouragement is especially important for women in the cocoa sector, whose work often goes unrecognised. Cocoa producer Sarah Maglas is part of the Kokoa Kamili cooperative in Tanzania, who won a 2021 Silver Award. She said, “I am participating in Cocoa of Excellence because I am a woman who produces high quality cocoa beans. It is important because through this participation I am able to convince other women to improve the quality that they are producing.”

For cocoa producers, Cocoa of Excellence’s independent judging by some of the top professionals in the cocoa sector is vital.

Cocoa of Excellence is, without a doubt, a very effective and recognised platform that gives small and medium cocoa producers like Finca La Cruz the opportunity to make themselves known among renowned chocolatiers in search of new and different aromas and flavours. In this event we are not only competing with the best cocoa producers in the world, but we are also being evaluated by a panel of professional tasters recognised for their integrity, ethics and transparency. Maria Elena Valenzuela Schellenberg, Finca La Cruz, Guatemala, 2021 Gold Award winner.

Gunars Valkirs, Maui Ku'ia Estate Chocolate, Hawaii, and 2021 Gold Award winner, said “I participate in Cocoa of Excellence because I feel it is the world’s most comprehensive and well-judged programme for the independent analysis of quality of cacao.” Australian cocoa grower, Darryl Kirk won a 2021 Bronze Award. He said “I participated to seek reassurance and recognition that our beans are of the

highest quality. Cocoa of Excellence is a global competition and I value the opinion and the advice and judgement from our international cocoa community.”

This independent verification—growing high quality cocoa and being acknowledged as one of the best in the world is not just an honour but it has important business impacts too. “We participate in Cocoa of Excellence 2021 because we want to give visibility to our work. This is very important for our income: this brings prosperity,” said João Dias Tavares Bisneto is a third generation cocoa producer from Brazil and a 2021 Gold Award winner.

This prosperity means that producers can build a better life for their families and their communities with more opportunities. Increased income means increased capacity to improve infrastructure which has a whole range of positive impacts from better housing and sanitation to better education.

I have been growing cocoa to support my family since I was young. With what I earn from cocoa farming, I have been able to support my children to the point of sending some of them to Europe today, and others have gone to university. I built this whole house with the money from cocoa. Today, I have built an internal toilet and shower. Mr Dzitri Yawo Semanu, Togo, 2021 Gold Award winner.

Cocoa of Excellence takes the long view not just with recognizing quality and increasing profits for cocoa producers, but also in ensuring that genetic diversity in cocoa has long-term impact on the sector.

This diversity of cocoa flavours is amazing but we can explore and appreciate the potential of different cocoa flavours only by maintaining a constant high quality of the different process types starting from the selection and cultivation of the cocoa plant followed by other different transformation processes until the end product chocolate. This diversity must be further researched and also maintained for future generations. Karin Chatelain, Zurich University of Applied Sciences, Cocoa of Excellence Technical Committee.

Cocoa of Excellence has a direct benefit for scientists and researchers working to improve cocoa quality. The Centre de recherche FOFIFA in Madagascar won a 2021 Bronze Award for their experimental cocoa sample.

We have participated in the 2021 Edition of Cocoa of Excellence with the aim of reducing the gap between growers and operators in the chocolate sector and to have a place in the world market. The importance of our participation is the opportunity to market high-quality cocoa and the possibility to find partners. Visibility, as well as the improvement and development of skills, are assets. Jidor Kalo, head of the FOFIFA Ambanja regional research station, Madagascar, 2021 Bronze Award winner.

For producers like Christopher Fadriga from the Chris Fadriga Cacao Farm and Nursery, in the Philippines, being part of Cocoa of Excellence affirms his heirloom cocoa project.

Being part of Cocoa of Excellence has given us a sense of accomplishment and great satisfaction knowing that our beans have been selected as one of the Best 50 beans in the world and also made us believe in our project to preserve the old genetics. This heirloom cacao are remnants of the Criollo that came from Mexico and was brought into the country during the Manilla-Acapulco galleon trade about 400 years ago. It is our task to preserve these old genetics. Christopher Fadriga, Chris Fadriga Cacao Farm and Nursery, Philippines, 2021 Gold Award winner.

The 2021 Cocoa of Excellence Gold, Silver & Bronze Awards are:

Africa & the Indian Ocean

Gold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Madagascar, Coopérative TMAR du groupe UCLS, Ambodimanga, Ambanja, Diana, Commercial Sample No. CNCMDG02 • Togo, Kokou Toulassi, Efoupkani, Wawa, Plateaux, Commercial Sample No. N° 0005-2021-UTCC-TG • Togo, Yawo Semanu Dzitri, Agou, Gadza, Plateaux Ouest, Commercial Sample No. N° 0001-2021-UTCC-TG
Silver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cote d’Ivoire, Koffi kré Dongo, Tanda, Gontougo, Commercial Sample No. E8TAN • Ghana, Seth Opoku Yirenkyi, Tetekasum Amanfrom, Suhum, Eastern, Commercial Sample No. GH01 • Tanzania, Kokoa Kamili Ltd - Contributing farmers: Mbingu Sisters (convent), Anna Muyesi, Sarah Maglass, Mbingu Ward, Mlimba District, Morogoro Region, Commercial Sample No. ML2020-182 Women's Lot
Bronze	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cameroon, Martin Kamdjeu – Coopérative COOP CA EXPLADI, Nkondjock, Nkam, Littoral, Commercial Sample No. CMR-05 • Ghana, Charles Oppong, Amanfrom, Suhum, Eastern, Commercial, Sample No. GH03 • Ghana, Offinso Fine Flavour Cooperative, Offinso, Offinso South Municipal, Ashanti, Commercial Sample No. GH09 • Madagascar, Aly Robert, Antsatsaka, Ambanja, Diana, Commercial Sample No. CNCMDG04 • Madagascar, Centre de recherche FOFIFA Ambanja, Ambanja, Ambanja, Diana, Experimental Sample No. CNCMDG06 • Togo, Kodjo Etsonu, Amlamé, Amou, Plateaux, Commercial Sample No. N° 0003-2021-UTCC-TG • Uganda, Gideon Katuramu Sibugyo, Bundibugyo, Bundibugyo Ditrivt, Buganikire, Experimental Sample No. UGA-002

Asia, Pacific & Australia

Gold	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China, Zhong Chu - Hainan Xingke Tropical Crops Engineering Technology Co. LTD, Dalu Town, Qionghai, Hainan, Experimental Sample No. ZYP-6-8 • Hawaii, Maui Ku’ia Estate Chocolate, Lahaina, Ahupuaa Kuia, West Maui, Commercial Sample No. MKE-1819 • Indonesia, PT Perkebunan Nusantara XII, Krembangan, Surabaya, East Java, Commercial Sample No. INDO7 • Malaysia, Poimon Dangkat, Kota Marudu, Sabah, Commercial Sample No. COEX21-013 • Papua New Guinea, Autonomous Region of Bougainville (AROB), Autonomous Bougainville Government - Department of Primary Industries (ABG - DPI) - Kubu Research Station, Buka Town, North Bougainville, PNG Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Experimental Sample No. Sample C • Philippines, Arthur Lagoc, Davao City, Davao Region, Commercial Sample No. P013 • Philippines, Christopher Fadriga, Bago City, Negros Occidental, Region Vi, Experimental Sample No. P027 • Taiwan, Rui-Min Su, Wandan Township, Pingtung, Commercial Sample No. TWCC-0
Silver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hawaii, Will Lydgate — Lydgate Farms, Kapa'a, Commercial Sample No. 5/12/20 • Philippines, Chokolade de San Isidro, Inc. – Carlos Barsicula, San Isidro, Davao Del Norte, Davao Region, Commercial Sample No. P032
Bronze	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australia, Darryl Kirk, Shannonvale, Mossman, Far North Queensland, Commercial Sample No. ACF2021 • Malaysia, Sik Kim Soon, 18400 Temangan, Machang, Kelantan, Commercial Sample No. COEX21-011 • Papua New Guinea, Jeffery Banaga, Popondeta, Ijivitari District, Momase Region, Commercial Sample No. PNG-04

Central America & Caribbean

- Gold**
- **Guatemala**, María Elena Valenzuela Schellenberg - Finca La Cruz, Cuyotenango, Suchitepequez, Sur Occidente, Commercial Sample No. GT001
 - **Mexico**, José María Pascacio Muñoz, Barrio Benito Juarez-La Rioja, Cacahoatán, Soconusco, Commercial Sample No. 916
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- Silver**
- **Dominican Republic**, Cafin SAS, Batero, La Cueva, Commercial Sample No. Magdalena COE 2021
 - **Dominican Republic**, Specialty Cocoa Nuñez – COOPCANOR, San Francisco De Macoris, Provincia Duarte, Cibao, Commercial Sample No. COOPCANOR
 - **El Salvador**, Asociación Cooperativa de Producción Agropecuaria “Barra Ciega de R.L”, Canton Tonalá, Sonsonate, Occidental, Commercial Sample No. IICOEX027
 - **Puerto Rico**, José Martínez-Cruzado, Maricao, Commercial Sample No. 6
 - **Puerto Rico**, Yadira Vázquez, Fajardo, Bo. Naranjo, Pr 00738, Commercial Sample No. 7
 - **Trinidad and Tobago**, Annette Mills, Arima, Aripo, St. George East, Commercial Sample No. 1220201006
 - **Trinidad and Tobago**, Winthrop Harewood, Princes Town, Tableland, Victoria, Commercial Sample No. 1120201701
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- Bronze**
- **Nicaragua**, Cooperativa Flor de La Dalia, La Dalia Matagalpa, Commercial Sample No. eL4fCU
 - **Panama**, Comunidad de Los Caucheros - Forest Finance Panama S.A., Los Caucheros, Bocas Del Toro, Bocas Del Toro, Commercial Sample No. Muestra 2
 - **Panama**, Comunidad de Nuevo Paraiso - Forest Finance Panama S.A., Nuevo Paraiso, Bocas Del Toro, Bocas Del Toro, Commercial Sample No. Muestra 1
 - **Panama**, Meivis Ortiz y productoras asociadas, Ojo De Agua, Almirante, Bocas Del Toro, Commercial Sample No. CEL 1220-02
 - **Trinidad and Tobago**, Farmers from Four Roads Tamana Cocoa Association, Sangre Grande, Tamana, St. George East, Commercial Sample No. 1120200411

South America

- Gold**
- **Bolivia**, Barbarita Ayala Chao, Comunidad San Juan Del Urucú, Beni, Municipio De Riberalta -Beni, Commercial Sample No. M01-A88-BO-BE-RB-BACH
 - **Brazil**, João Dias Tavares Bisneto, Uruçuca, Bahia, Northeast, Commercial Sample No. 1785
 - **Peru**, Cooperativa Agraria ACOPAGRO Ltda., C.P. La Libertad, San Rafael/ Provincia: Bellavista, San Martín, Commercial Sample No. 008-CNCC
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- Silver**
- **Bolivia**, ARCASY (Asociacion de Recolectores de cacao silvestre Yuracare) - Comunidad Santa Anita, Yuracare, D8/Cochabamba, Tco - Yuracare, Commercial Sample No. M04-B85-BO-CBBA-TCO-Y-SA
 - **Brazil**, Angélica Maria Tavares Lima Fernandes, Uruçuca, Bahia, Northeast, Commercial Sample No. 1784
 - **Brazil**, João Evangelista Lima, Novo Repartimento (Tuerê), Pará, North, Commercial Sample No. 1816
 - **Ecuador**, Hacienda San José - Jorge Cecilio Marún Ramirez, Babahoyo, Mata De Cacao, Costa, Commercial Sample No. CEEC 217
 - **Peru**, Cooperativa Agraria Norandino - APPAGROP Quemazón, Cpm La Quemazon S/N, San Juan De Bigote - Morropon, Piura, Commercial Sample No. 001-CNCC
-
- Bronze**
- **Colombia**, Alex Antonio Ayala Aleman, Valencia, Cordoba, Commercial Sample No. FEDE006
 - **Peru**, Efrain Puma Chambi – Agro industrias puma real s.r.l, Koribeni, La Convencion Echarate, Cusco, Commercial Sample No. 007-CNCC

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KEY FIGURES for the 2021 Edition

- **53 cocoa-producing origins** participated.
- **235 cocoa bean samples** received, and analysed for physical and sensory qualities.
- **234 cocoa bean samples accepted** and processed into liquor for sensory evaluation.
- **50 superior quality cocoa samples selected** and processed into tempered and moulded chocolate.
- **39 experts and professional chocolate makers** blindly evaluated the Best 50 samples.
- **16 Gold, 17 Silver, and 17 Bronze Awards** presented at the virtual Ceremony on 16 December 2021

About Cocoa of Excellence

Cocoa of Excellence recognises cocoa quality and flavour diversity to improve farmers' livelihoods and drive sustainability of the cocoa supply chain since 2009. Its vision is Excellence in the cocoa sector catalysing multiple benefits for resilient and thriving agricultural systems at landscape and global level. The Cocoa of Excellence Awards is a global competition to recognise the work of cocoa farmers and celebrate quality, flavour diversity and unique origins. By bringing together leading sensory evaluation experts, the chocolate industry and the next generation of cocoa pioneers, Cocoa of Excellence rewards cocoa with superior and unique flavours, while bringing know-how, cocoa evaluation tools, market opportunities and incentives for safeguarding cocoa diversity to farming communities and national organisations globally.

Cocoa of Excellence is led by the Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), part of the CGIAR and organized in partnership with the International Cocoa Organization (ICCO), Guittard Chocolate, Seguire Cacao, Cocoa and Chocolate Advisors, the USDA project Maximising Opportunities for Cacao and Coffee in Latin America (MOCCA), the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Salon du Chocolat / Event International, Barry Callebaut and Cacao Barry, Puratos-Becolade, the Cocoa Research Centre of the University of the West Indies (CRC/UWI), Valrhona, Regis Bouet, TreeGether, Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina Peru, the Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG), the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), CacaoCrudo, Herencia, CocoaTown, SGS, OLAM, Alexandre Chocolaterie, ClearChox, Universidad del Valle de Guatemala and the Organizzazione internazionale italo-latino americana (IILA), and FairTrade International.

The Alliance of Bioversity International and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) delivers research-based solutions that harness agricultural biodiversity and sustainably transform food systems to improve people's lives. The Alliance is part of CGIAR, the world's largest agricultural research and innovation partnership for a food-secure future dedicated to reducing poverty, enhancing food and nutrition security, and improving natural resources. www.bioversityinternational.org / www.ciat.cgiar.org / www.cgiar.org

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