



# Press Release

For immediate release

## Global cacao sector tests quality as economic strategy amid climate and market pressure

As climate disruption and extreme price volatility destabilise global cacao supply, the sector is searching for ways to escape a commodity model that has left most producers exposed to risk and low returns. Across producing regions, farmers are increasingly turning to quality differentiation as one of the few tools available to influence their economic future.

Next week, the Cacao of Excellence Awards will reveal the results of an 18-month international evaluation cycle focused on the economic role of quality in cacao markets.

This edition evaluated 191 cacao bean samples from 45 producing countries through laboratory analysis, standardised chocolate transformation, and blind sensory assessment by an international jury of 38 cacao and chocolate experts, supported by a technical committee specialising in cacao sensory analysis. The Best 50 cacaos will be presented as individual chocolates in the Cacao of Excellence Treasure Box, offering a rare comparative snapshot of global cacao diversity.

The Cacao of Excellence programme is hosted by the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT and operates as a global platform linking research, training and international market visibility for cacao producers.

*“Cacao connects livelihoods, biodiversity and global food systems. Recognising quality helps producers show the value of their work and build more stable futures in a sector under real pressure.”*

— Stephan Weise, Programme Director, Cacao of Excellence

The programme arrives at a moment of structural tension in cacao markets. Climate risk, supply concentration and market volatility are forcing a reconsideration of how value is created and distributed across the chain. For many producers, international recognition of quality offers a route into higher-value relationships with buyers seeking differentiated cacao.

Through national competitions coordinated by 45 National Organisation Committees, the Awards connect local producers to international evaluation and visibility. For participating farmers, the programme provides an opportunity to position their cacao within a global framework that recognises flavour and post-harvest expertise.

*“The Awards create a shared way to talk about excellence,”* said Julien Simonis, Programme Manager of Cacao of Excellence. *“If quality is going to influence markets, it has to be visible and comparable across borders.”*



*“For producers, quality is practical,” Simonis added. “When their cacao is evaluated internationally, buyers see their work differently and new conversations become possible.”*

Beyond the competition, the programme supports research and training that strengthen local expertise in cacao evaluation. Over time, it is helping build a shared global reference for quality, closer to the specialty coffee model, where flavour and farming skill translate more directly into economic value.

The Awards will take place on **February 20 at the Beurs van Berlage Convention Centre during the Chocoo Trade Fair**, structured as four regional ceremonies across the day:

- 09:30** — Opening ceremony
- 10:00–10:45** — Asia and the Pacific
- 11:00–11:45** — Africa and the Indian Ocean
- 15:00–15:45** — South America
- 16:00–16:45** — Central America and the Caribbean
- 16:45–17:15** — Closing ceremony

All times listed are Central European Time (CET). The full programme will be livestreamed on the Cacao of Excellence Facebook and YouTube channels.

Media are invited to attend in person or follow the livestream and request interviews with programme leadership, jurors and participating producers.

### **About Cacao of Excellence**

Cacao of Excellence is an international programme of the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT dedicated to identifying and evaluating high-quality cacao and improving producers’ access to higher-value markets through quality recognition. It operates a global system linking research, training and international visibility, helping build a shared reference for cacao quality across producing regions. The programme’s long-term aim is to connect flavour, biodiversity and farming skill more directly to economic value.

### **About the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT**

The Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT delivers research-based solutions that harness agricultural biodiversity and sustainably transform food systems to improve people’s lives. It is part of CGIAR, a global research partnership for a food-secure future, working with partners across Latin America, Asia and Africa to address climate, biodiversity, nutrition and resilience challenges.

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