



Questions and Answers (Q&A) document

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Description: RFP for Baseline Evaluation

For: USDA-funded Food for Progress Program (FFPr)-Colombia

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Implemented By: Counterpart International Inc.

Per section 1.8 of the above-mentioned RFP, COUNTERPART International (hereinafter COUNTERPART) hereby provides answers to questions received from organizations and/or firms interested in submitting a proposal to conduct the baseline study of the Food for Progress Project in Colombia. This Questions and Answers (Q&A) document has been prepared to provide clarity and guidance regarding the RFP. It consolidates inquiries received from prospective offerors and presents Counterpart's official responses to ensure transparency, consistency, and equal access to information. The answers are intended to supplement, not replace, the requirements outlined in the RFP. Offerors should rely on this document, together with the RFP and any subsequent amendments (if any), when preparing their submission.

Only the written answers issued by Counterpart in this Q&A document are considered official and carry weight in the RFP process and subsequent evaluation. Any verbal information received from employees of Counterpart, or any other entity should not be considered an official response to any questions regarding this RFP.

Answers to Questions.

For efficiency and to avoid repetition, questions addressing the same topic have been consolidated into a single entry, when possible. Also, for questions submitted in Spanish, we are providing a translation to English.

Question 1. Favor confirmar si el contrato a celebrarse será a precio global. En caso contrario, y de contemplarse la modalidad de gastos reembolsables, solicitamos amablemente aclarar cuál es el procedimiento administrativo establecido para el reconocimiento y trámite de dichos gastos.
Please confirm if the contract to be entered into will be at a global price. Otherwise, and if the modality of reimbursable expenses is contemplated, we kindly request clarification of the administrative procedure established for the recognition and processing of such expenses



Answer: As stated in section I.4.b of the RFP, Counterpart anticipates issuing a firm-fixed-price type contract.

- Question 2.** Solicitamos aclarar si es válida la conformación de alianzas tipo unión temporal.
We request clarification if the formation of temporary union type alliances is valid.
Answer: Per section I.4.A. Tech 5, subcontracting arrangements are acceptable if the requirements of that section are met. However, it is not necessary to establish a temporary union (“union temporal”) in accordance with Colombian public contracting law.
- Question 3.** ¿La propuesta puede ser escrita en el idioma español?
Can the proposal be written in Spanish?
Answer: No, per section I.3 of the RFP, the proposal must be submitted in English.
- Question 4.** ¿Existen oficinas territoriales de Counterpart International en municipios de los 4 departamentos donde se ejecuta o se ejecutará el proyecto AMCA?
Are there territorial offices of Counterpart International in municipalities of the 4 departments where the AMCA project is or will be executed?
Answer: No, at the moment there are no offices in the four departments of geographical coverage.
- Question 5.** Favor indicar en qué etapa o avance se encuentra el proyecto AMCA en Colombia.
Please indicate at what stage or progress the AMCA project is in Colombia.
Answer: The project started on September 23, 2025, and at this moment it will carry out its first technical activity, which is the Baseline.
- Question 6.** Se plantea la necesidad de la recoger información primaria cuantitativa en población tratada y no tratada (control) por el Programa. ¿En cuantos municipios y veredas de cada uno de los 4 departamentos en los que se desarrollará la intervención están ubicados los productores de tratamiento?
The need to collect quantitative primary information in the population treated and not treated (control) by the Program is raised. In how many municipalities and villages of each of the 4 departments in which the intervention will be developed are the treatment producers located?
Answer: As stated in the RFP in section "11. Sample Size", the sample approach can be "Proportionate stratified random sampling by department & value chain", the contractor must define it, taking into account that the purpose established in the "Purpose of tool" column can be achieved.
- Question 7.** ¿En qué momento Counterpart International entregará la información anonimizada del número de beneficiarios por municipio y vereda, para la construcción de la propuesta metodológica?
At what point will Counterpart International deliver the anonymized information on the number of beneficiaries per municipality and village, for the construction of the methodological proposal?
Answer: Counterpart will not provide beneficiary information.



Question 8. ¿El Programa AMCA cubrirá todos los productores de la cadena de valor de Cacao en estos 4 departamentos? O ¿quedarán sectores o zonas de productores de Cacao que no son y no serán intervenidas?

Will the AMCA Program cover all producers in the Cacao value chain in these 4 departments? Or will there be sectors or areas of cacao producers that are not and will not be intervened?

Answer: The AMCA program will not cover all cacao producers across the targeted departments. Instead, the project will apply a strategic and targeted intervention approach focused on specific producer groups, value chain actors, and geographic clusters that demonstrate strong potential for improving productivity, quality, and market integration with U.S. buyers.

Question 9. ¿Todos los productores que cumplirían con las condiciones de acceder a los beneficios del Programa entrarán? O ¿algunos no entraran por no cumplir algún requisito?

Will all producers who would meet the conditions to access the benefits of the Program enter? Or will some not enter because they do not meet some requirements?

Answer: See answer to question #8.

Question 10. ¿Cómo se daría la selección de los productores de cacao participantes, es decir, los tratados? ¿Cuáles serán las condiciones o requisitos para que un productor de cacao de estos 4 departamentos fuera considerado para ser parte del Programa?

How would the selection of the participating cacao producers, i.e., the treaties, take place? What will be the conditions or requirements for a cacao producer from these 4 departments to be considered part of the Program?

Answer: The producers selected in the departments within the geographical scope of the Program will be those who can be part of the treatment sample; those outside these departments will be part of the control sample.

Question 11. ¿Existe alguna razón técnica para considerar que la muestra de productores tratados sea más grande que la muestra de controles?

Is there any technical reason to consider the sample of treated producers to be larger than the sample of controls?

Answer: Yes. The evaluation uses a larger sample of treated producers because the primary objective is to measure changes among program beneficiaries across key outcomes such as productivity, SPS compliance, market access, and adoption of improved practices. A larger treatment sample (about 600 **producers**) allows for more precise estimates and supports subgroup analysis by department, commodity, and intervention type.

The control group (about 400 **producers**) serves mainly as a comparison benchmark to contextualize observed changes among beneficiaries. A **60/40 treatment-to-control ratio** provides a practical balance between statistical rigor and cost efficiency while also accounting for potential panel attrition over the course of the evaluations.



Question 12. ¿De los 8000 productores que conformarán el universo de referencia de la cadena de valor de cacao, Counterpart International cuenta con información de contacto actualizada como números de teléfono, dirección y/o referencias espaciales de ubicación?

Of the 8000 producers that will make up the reference universe of the cocoa value chain, does Counterpart International have updated contact information such as telephone numbers, address and/or spatial location references?

Answer: The TOR indicates that the baseline evaluation will draw its sample from an estimated population of approximately 8,000 cacao producers within the project's target departments. However, the ToR does not specify that a fully consolidated database with updated contact details (such as telephone numbers, addresses, or geospatial references) is currently available for all producers in this reference population. As noted in the document, the service provider will receive support from the AMCA project team to help locate participants and stakeholders, and Counterpart staff will provide relevant information and documentation where available to facilitate the evaluation process.

Question 13. ¿Actualmente cuenta el programa AMCA con datos de contacto de compradores/importadores, productores de nueces, asociaciones, y demás actores a ser abordados a través de los ejercicios cuantitativos y cualitativos?

Does the AMCA program currently have contact information for buyers/importers, nut producers, associations, and other actors to be addressed through quantitative and qualitative exercises?

Answer: Counterpart has initial information on some contacts of nut producers or marketers, but it is expected that the contractor will obtain the information that will allow the Baseline scope to be developed.

Question 14. ¿De los 8000 productores que conformarán el universo de referencia de la cadena de valor de cacao se cuenta con información que permita caracterizarlos, como tamaño del predio, producción de cacao del año anterior y nivel educativo, sexo, ingresos, del jefe del hogar, tamaño del hogar, entre otras?

Of the 8000 producers that will make up the reference universe of the cocoa value chain, is there information that allows characterizing them, such as farm size, cacao production of the previous year and educational level, sex, income, head of household, household size, among others?

Answer: Please review answer to question 12.

Question 15. En la tabla 2 se menciona 5000 productores de cacao como beneficiarios. Ahora bien, en la sección 12 “Sampling design” se hace referencia a una población estimada de 8000 productores. Muy amablemente se solicita aclarar cuál es el universo de productores de cacao, de donde se seleccionará la muestra tratamiento y la muestra control.

Table 2 mentions 5000 cacao producers as beneficiaries. However, in section 12 Sampling design reference is made to an estimated population of 8000 producers.



It is kindly requested to clarify which is the universe of cacao producers, from which the treatment sample and the control sample will be selected.

Answer: The 8,000 producers is the initial estimate of producers in the four departments and would constitute the population for the treatment sample. The population for the control sample would be the number of producers outside these four departments, and its sample size has been established in section "11. Sample Size" of the RFP.

Question 16. *¿Existen requerimientos de margen de error, coeficiente de variación, nivel de confianza, mínimo efecto detectable que se deberían considerar al momento de la elaboración de la propuesta metodológica?*

Are there requirements for margin of error, coefficient of variation, level of confidence, minimum detectable effect that should be considered when preparing the methodological proposal?

Answer: Yes. The methodological proposal should follow standard statistical parameters commonly used in USDA-supported evaluations. Specifically, the proposed sampling design for the AMCA baseline and subsequent evaluations is based on a 95% confidence level and an approximate margin of error of 5–6%, which are consistent with accepted practices for agricultural and market-systems evaluations.

While the Terms of Reference do not prescribe a specific coefficient of variation or minimum detectable effect, evaluators are encouraged to propose appropriate assumptions for these parameters based on the characteristics of the target population and the indicators being measured. The evaluation design should ensure sufficient statistical power to detect meaningful differences between treatment and comparison groups and to support longitudinal analysis across baseline, midterm, and final evaluations.

Question 17. *¿Existen algún margen de error esperado para las desagregaciones según sexo, edad, departamento, etc.?*

Is there any expected margin of error for disaggregation by sex, age, department, etc.?

Answer: The evaluation design targets an overall margin of error of approximately 5–6% at a 95% confidence level for the full farmer sample. However, no specific margin of error is prescribed for all disaggregated sub-groups (e.g., sex, age, department).

Disaggregation analyses will be conducted where sample sizes allow for statistically meaningful interpretation. For smaller sub-groups, results may be presented as indicative or descriptive findings rather than statistically precise estimates. Offerors are encouraged to consider stratification and adequate representation of key groups such as women producers and major geographic clusters when proposing their sampling approach.



Question 18. ¿Es posible conocer el municipio donde se ubican las granjas que serán sujeto de observación en sitio? O ¿es parte de la propuesta técnica la selección de estas?
Is it possible to know the municipality where the farms that will be subject to on-site observation are located? Or is the selection of this part of the technical proposal?

Answer: The specific municipalities where farms will be selected for on-site observation have not yet been finalized. The project will operate within the targeted departments (Cauca, Huila, Tolima, Nariño, and Caldas), but the precise municipalities and farm locations will be confirmed during the baseline preparation phase once the beneficiary mapping and sampling frame are validated. Therefore, the methodological proposal should include a proposed approach for selecting municipalities and farms for on-site observation, consistent with the overall sampling strategy and geographic distribution of project beneficiaries. The final selection will be coordinated with the project team to ensure representation across key value chain clusters, commodities, and intervention areas while maintaining methodological rigor and logistical feasibility.

Question 19. Se indica en los términos de referencia que el periodo para ejecutar el estudio es de 18 semanas, esperando iniciar el 6 de mayo. Considerando las actividades a realizar, muy amablemente se solicita ampliar el plazo de ejecución del proyecto.
It is indicated in the terms of reference that the period to carry out the study is 18 weeks, expected to start on May 6. Considering the activities to be carried out, it is very kindly requested to extend the execution period of the project.

Answer: The baseline implementation time is as set in the RFP, 18 weeks.

Question 20. En la tabla 3 la cual está asociada con el cronograma, se indica que la actividad “Data entry, cleaning, analysis, and report writing” se desarrolla en una semana. ¿Es nuestra apreciación correcta? Si nuestra apreciación es correcta, muy amablemente solicitamos ajustar el tiempo, dado que una semana es un tiempo corto para ejecutar la recolección, limpieza y reporte de los datos.

Table 3, which is associated with the schedule, indicates that the "Data entry, cleaning, analysis, and report writing" activity takes place in one week. Is our assessment correct? If our assessment is correct, we very kindly request to adjust the time, since a week is a short time to execute the collection, cleaning and reporting of the data.

Answer: Table 3 in the Terms of Reference provides an illustrative timeline for the main deliverables, and the duration indicated for each activity should be interpreted as an estimated allocation within the overall baseline study schedule, rather than a strict operational limit. As noted in the Technical Specifications (Section III of the RFP), applicants are expected to propose their own detailed timeline and level of effort in the Gantt Chart that accompanies the technical proposal, consistent with the overall baseline study duration that cannot be modified. The baseline study is expected to take approximately eighteen (18) weeks to complete, beginning around May 6, 2026. Within this overall timeframe, offerors may structure activities such



as data entry, cleaning, statistical analysis, and report preparation in a manner that ensures methodological rigor and data quality.

Question 21. De acuerdo con las actividades detalladas en la tabla 3 Deliverables Timeline, ¿no se espera la realización de una prueba piloto?

According to the activities detailed in table 3 Deliverables Timeline, is a pilot test not expected?

Answer: Yes, a pilot test of the data collection instruments is expected as part of the baseline study process. Although Table 3 (Deliverables Timeline) does not list the pilot test as a standalone deliverable, the ToR indicates that the evaluation firm is responsible for developing, testing, and refining the data collection tools prior to full-scale field implementation. Specifically, the ToR states that the evaluation firm will develop data collection instruments and incorporate revisions following training and pilots, before finalizing the tools and proceeding with data collection. This indicates that pilot testing is considered part of the tool development, enumerator training, and field preparation process rather than a separate contractual milestone.

Question 22. Para dar respuesta a las preguntas de investigación, como parte de las encuestas ¿se toma como base la información que reporten las personas encuestadas? Es decir, ¿no es necesario hacer verificación en terreno de lo que se manifiesta verbalmente?

To answer the research questions, as part of the surveys, is the information reported by the people surveyed based on it? In other words, is it not necessary to verify on the ground what is manifested verbally?

Answer: The baseline evaluation will rely on a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative methods and direct field observations to ensure the reliability and validity of the information collected. As described in the ToR, quantitative surveys will collect structured data from producers and other value-chain actors regarding production practices, access to finance, market linkages, and other key indicators relevant to the project's results framework. However, the evaluation design does not rely solely on self-reported information from survey respondents. The methodology also includes key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and direct field observations, including visits to farms and post-harvest facilities. These activities are intended to validate practices such as technology adoption, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) practices, and post-harvest processes (e.g., fermentation and drying), thereby allowing the evaluation team to triangulate survey responses with on-site observations and qualitative evidence.

Question 23. ¿Se deberá levantar información del polígono sembrado de cacao del productor (tratamiento y/o control) objeto de encuesta? En caso afirmativo ¿A cuál área sembrada de cacao se le debería levantar la información en caso de que el productor(a) cuente con más de un área sembrada de cacao en un mismo predio o predios diferentes?

Should information be collected from the producer's cacao-planted polygon (treatment and/or control) subject to the survey? If so, to which cacao planted area



should the information be collected in case the producer has more than one cacao planted area in the same or different farms?

Answer: The ToRs indicate that the baseline study will collect quantitative information from cacao producers regarding production characteristics such as yield per hectare, number of trees, cultivated area, and farming practices. The survey is designed to measure baseline conditions for key indicators related to productivity, technology adoption, market access, and SPS compliance among participating and comparison producers. However, the ToR does not require the collection of geospatial polygon data for each cacao plot. The producer survey is intended to capture farm-level production information through structured questionnaires rather than detailed geospatial mapping of individual plots.

Question 24. Por motivos como orden público, desastres naturales o predios muy dispersos ¿se podría convocar a los productores (tratamiento y/o control) objeto de encuesta a un lugar (escuela/colegio, salón comunal, iglesia, predio de otro productor, etc.) diferente a su predio y/o lugar de residencia?

For reasons such as public order, natural disasters or widely dispersed properties, could the producers (treatment and/or control) subject to the survey be summoned to a place (school/college, community hall, church, property of another producer, etc.) different from their property and/or place of residence?

Answer: The ToR indicates that the baseline evaluation will involve field-based data collection activities, including producer surveys, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and direct observations at farms and post-harvest facilities. These observations are intended to help validate farming practices, SPS compliance, and post-harvest processes through site visits. Given these methodological requirements, the evaluation design anticipates that data collection will generally occur at or near the producers' farms or operational sites, particularly where direct observation is necessary to verify production practices and post-harvest systems. However, the ToR also provides the evaluation firm with responsibility for organizing fieldwork logistics, including the recruitment of enumerators and the management of data collection activities in the target regions.

Question 25. Para las encuestas a Pymes (empresas) colombianas, encuestas a agricultores estadounidenses, encuestas a asociaciones comerciales de EE. UU y las entrevistas con actores claves ¿se espera trabajar en conjunto con Counterpart International para organizar la logística, la contactabilidad y la aplicación de las encuestas y/o entrevistas en Colombia y/o en EE. UU? o ¿dichas actividades serán de completa responsabilidad de la firma contratada?

For the Colombian SME (company) surveys, U.S. farmer surveys, U.S. trade association surveys, and stakeholder interviews, do you expect to work together with Counterpart International to organize the logistics, contactability, and implementation of the surveys and/or interviews in Colombia and/or the U.S.? Or will these activities be the full responsibility of the contracted firm?

Answer: According to the ToR, the independent evaluation firm will be responsible for implementing the baseline study, including the design of the



methodology, data collection, analysis, and reporting. This includes organizing and conducting surveys, interviews, and other data collection activities required for the evaluation. At the same time, the ToR specifies that the evaluation firm will receive operational support from the AMCA project team, including assistance in providing relevant documentation, identifying stakeholders, and supporting the process of locating participants and interviewees where appropriate.

Question 26. ¿Dentro del universo de productores (tratamiento y/o control) está contemplado aplicar la encuesta a personas menores de 18 años?

Within the universe of producers (treatment and/or control) is it contemplated to apply the survey to people under 18 years of age?

Answer: No.

Question 27. Solicitamos que, como insumo para la propuesta, suministren un cuadro en que discriminen por departamento y municipio las 5.000 familiar productoras.

We request that, as input for the proposal, you provide a table in which you discriminate by department and municipality the 5,000 family producers.

Answer: At this stage, the project does not have a finalized list of the 5,000 cacao-producing families disaggregated by department and municipality available for inclusion in the RFP documentation. As indicated in the Terms of Reference, beneficiary targeting will follow a transparent, criteria-based selection process aligned with USDA requirements, guided by eligibility criteria such as geographic alignment, SPS readiness, market linkage potential, production capacity, and willingness to co-invest. The ToR further notes that the final identification and validation of beneficiaries will occur during project implementation and may be informed by the baseline assessment itself. As a result, a detailed list of producers by department and municipality is not yet available as an input for the proposal.

Question 28. ¿En qué momento comenzarán las familias cacaoteras seleccionadas a recibir el apoyo directo?

At what point will the selected cocoa families begin to receive direct support?

Answer: The ToR indicate that the baseline study is intended to establish the initial conditions of the project prior to the full implementation of AMCA interventions. The baseline evaluation will collect and validate starting values for project indicators and assess current production practices, market access conditions, and institutional capacities before project-supported activities begin at scale. As described in the ToR, beneficiary targeting and validation will occur during the early stages of project implementation through a transparent, criteria-based selection process aligned with USDA requirements, including eligibility criteria such as geographic alignment, SPS readiness, production capacity, and market linkage potential. Accordingly, the selected cacao-producing families will begin receiving direct project support after the baseline phase and once beneficiary selection and implementation planning are finalized. The baseline study itself will help confirm beneficiary profiles, validate geographic targeting, and establish the reference conditions against which future project results will be measured



Question 29. ¿De qué tamaño es el subconjunto de familias que serán seleccionadas para recibir el beneficio?

What is the size of the subset of families that will be selected to receive the benefit?

Answer: The ToR indicate that the project will target a subset of Colombia's approximately 5,000 cacao-producing families for direct support; however, the exact number of families that will ultimately receive benefits has not yet been finalized at this stage. For purposes of the baseline evaluation design, the ToR provides indicative information on the sampling strategy, which proposes surveying 1,000 cacao farmers (approximately 600 treatment and 400 control) drawn from an estimated population of around 8,000 producers across the target departments. This sampling framework is intended to ensure statistically valid baseline measurements rather than to define the final number of project beneficiaries.

Question 30. Solicitamos informar cómo estará distribuido por municipio ese subconjunto de familias que seleccionarán?

We request to inform how this subset of families that you will select will be distributed by municipality

Answer: At this stage, the project does not have a finalized distribution of the subset of beneficiary families by municipality available for inclusion in the RFP. As described in the Terms of Reference, beneficiary identification will follow a transparent, criteria-based selection process aligned with USDA requirements. This process will consider factors such as geographic alignment, SPS readiness, market linkage potential, production capacity, and willingness to co-invest. The ToR specifies that the project's geographic targeting focuses on four priority departments Huila, Caldas, Nariño, and Tolima which were selected based on their specialty cacao potential, lower cadmium levels, existing processing infrastructure, and alignment with U.S. buyer sourcing strategies. Within these departments, the final distribution of beneficiary families by municipality will be determined during project implementation in coordination with local partners and value chain actors.

Question 31. ¿Cuáles municipios conforman la cobertura geográfica de los productores de cacao?

Which municipalities make up the geographical coverage of cocoa producers?

Answer: The ToR specify that the AMCA project will focus geographically on four priority departments in Colombia: Huila, Caldas, Nariño, and Tolima, selected due to their strong specialty cacao potential, relatively lower cadmium levels, established processing infrastructure, and alignment with U.S. buyer sourcing strategies. However, the ToR does not provide a specific list of municipalities within these departments that will constitute the final geographic coverage of cacao producers participating in the project. As noted in the document, beneficiary targeting will follow a transparent, criteria-based process, and the identification and validation of producers and participating communities will occur during project implementation in collaboration with government institutions, private-sector partners, and value chain actors.



Question 32. ¿La entidad suministrará la información de identificación, contacto y ubicación de los productores objeto de estudio, es decir, la base de datos para conformar el marco de muestreo del universo de estudio?

Will the entity provide the identification, contact and location information of the producers under study, that is, the database to form the sampling framework of the universe under study?

Answer: Please review the answer to question number 12.

Question 33. Así mismo, ¿la entidad suministrará la base con la identificación y contacto de los representantes de las organizaciones a las cuales pertenecen los productores objeto de estudio?

Likewise, will the entity provide the basis with the identification and contact of the representatives of the organizations to which the producers under study belong?

Answer: Please review the answer to question number 12.

Question 34. Solicitamos una base de datos por departamento y municipio con la cantidad de productores objeto de estudio.

We requested a database by department and municipality with the number of producers under study.

Answer: At this stage, Counterpart International is not able to provide a database disaggregated by department and municipality with the number of producers under study as part of the proposal inputs. As outlined in the ToR, beneficiary identification and targeting will follow a transparent, criteria-based process aligned with USDA requirements, considering factors such as geographic alignment, SPS readiness, market linkage potential, production capacity, and willingness to co-invest.

Question 35. Solicitamos detallar cuáles son los otros actores del sector privado, según tipo o segmento poblacional, que deben considerarse como población objetivo 2 (además de los productores de cacao).

We request details of the other actors in the private sector, according to type or segment of the population, that should be considered as target population 2 (in addition to cocoa producers).

Answer: According to the ToR, in addition to cacao producers, the baseline evaluation will collect information from other private-sector actors involved in the cacao value chain and related trade systems. These actors are identified in the document as part of the broader beneficiary and stakeholder groups that participate in or influence the functioning of the sector. Specifically, the ToR indicates that the evaluation may include private-sector actors involved in post-harvest processing, value addition, and trade, including Colombian SMEs, processors, and other value-chain enterprises connected to cacao production and commercialization. In addition, the baseline design includes engagement with U.S. private-sector actors and trade-related stakeholders, such as U.S. buyers/importers and trade associations, to better understand market demand, export readiness, and barriers affecting two-way agricultural trade between Colombia and the United States.



Question 36. En el mismo sentido de lo anterior, solicitamos la distribución por departamento y municipio de los actores del sector privado según tipo.

In the same sense of the above, we request the distribution by department and municipality of the actors of the private sector according to type.

Answer: Please review the answer to question number 35.

Question 37. Solicitamos la definición operativa de grupo tratamiento y control, es decir, cuáles son los criterios de inclusión para productores tratados y controles.

We request the operational definition of treatment and control group, that is, what are the inclusion criteria for treated producers and controls.

Answer: The ToR indicates that the baseline evaluation will use a non-experimental evaluation design, incorporating a comparison group where it is feasible to support contribution analysis and strengthen interpretation of results. This approach is consistent with USDA FFPr evaluation guidance and recognizes that a randomized experimental design is not feasible due to the complexity of the cacao value chain and the presence of parallel interventions. For the purposes of the baseline survey, the proposed sampling framework includes 1,000 cacao producers (approximately 600 treatment and 400 control) drawn from the population of cacao producers in the four priority departments Huila, Tolima, Nariño, and Caldas.

Question 38. ¿El diseño estratificado y proporcional será definido e implementado (seleccionada la muestra de municipios y productores) por la entidad?

Will the stratified and proportional design be defined and implemented (the sample of municipalities and producers selected) by the entity?

Answer: Yes. According to the ToR, the independent evaluation firm will be responsible for defining and implementing the sampling design, including the stratified and proportional sampling approach for the baseline survey. The ToR specifies that the evaluator will make methodological decisions related to the evaluation design, sampling, data collection, analysis, and findings, consistent with USDA evaluation standards. The document also notes that the baseline will apply a proportionate stratified random sampling approach for the quantitative survey to ensure representativeness and allow comparisons across key dimensions such as department and treatment status

Question 39. ¿Cuáles son las unidades de muestreo a considerar en el diseño?

What are the sampling units to consider in the design?

Answer: According to the ToR, the primary sampling units for the baseline evaluation are individual cacao producers (farmers) within the project's geographic focus areas. The quantitative component of the baseline survey proposes a sample of 1,000 farmers (approximately 600 treatment and 400 control) drawn from the population of cacao producers across the four priority departments: Huila, Tolima, Nariño, and Caldas. The ToR specifies that the quantitative sampling will follow a proportionate stratified random sampling design, with stratification by department, value chain participation, and treatment status to ensure statistical representativeness and enable comparisons across groups over time.



Question 40. ¿Cuál es la cantidad mínima de municipios a incluir en la muestra?

What is the minimum number of municipalities to be included in the sample?

Answer: The ToR does not specify the minimum number of municipalities that must be included in the sample. Instead, the document defines the geographic scope of the baseline evaluation at the departmental level, identifying four priority departments Huila, Caldas, Nariño, and Tolima where the project interventions and baseline data collection will take place.

Question 41. Solicitamos informar la cantidad de entrevistas (KII), de grupos (FGD) y observaciones directas que esperan de esta consultoría.

We request you to report on the number of interviews (KII), groups (FGD) and direct observations that they expect from this consultancy.

Answer: Please review Table 2, in the "11. Sample Size" section of the RFP.

Question 42. ¿En cuántos municipios se aplicarán los instrumentos cualitativos?

In how many municipalities will the qualitative instruments be applied?

Answer: The Terms of Reference do not specify a fixed number of municipalities in which qualitative instruments will be applied. Instead, the document defines the overall geographic scope of the baseline evaluation at the departmental level, focusing on the four priority departments of Huila, Caldas, Nariño, and Tolima.

Question 43. Solicitamos suministrar un cuadro en que discriminen la cantidad de encuestas por departamento y municipio.

We request to provide a table in which they discriminate the number of surveys by department and municipality.

Answer: At this stage, Counterpart International is not able to provide a table disaggregating the number of surveys by department and municipality as part of the proposal inputs. As described in the ToR, the baseline evaluation will cover the project's four priority departments Huila, Caldas, Nariño, and Tolima and will include a quantitative survey of approximately 1,000 cacao producers (including both treatment and comparison groups)

Question 44. ¿Existe un contenido aproximado del contenido de cada instrumento (herramienta), cuanti y cuali, que la entidad pueda suministrar al consultor previo el inicio de la ejecución del contrato?

Is there an approximate content of the content of each instrument (tool), quantity and quali, that the entity can provide to the consultant prior to the start of the execution of the contract?

Answer: According to the ToR, the development and finalization of data collection instruments including both quantitative survey questionnaires and qualitative tools will be part of the responsibilities of the contracted evaluation firm. The evaluator is expected to design the instruments in line with the evaluation questions, project indicators, and methodological approach proposed in the technical proposal. During the inception phase, the selected firm will prepare draft versions of the



quantitative and qualitative tools (e.g., producer surveys, SME surveys, KII and FGD guides), which will then be reviewed and validated in coordination with Counterpart before field deployment. The instruments will also be subject to training and pilot testing prior to final data collection

Question 45. ¿la entidad puede informar el tiempo promedio de diligenciamiento de cada instrumento (herramienta)?

Can the entity report the average completion time of each instrument (tool)?

Answer: This must be determined by the contractor to meet the Baseline objectives.

Question 46. ¿Cada municipio incluido en la muestra debe tener productores tratamiento y control?

Does each municipality included in the sample have to have producers, treatment and control?

Answer: The ToR does not require that each municipality included in the sample contains both treatment and control producers. Instead, the ToR specifies that the baseline evaluation will use a proportionate stratified sampling approach to ensure that the overall sample adequately represents both treatment and comparison groups across the project's geographic scope. The sampling framework proposes surveying approximately 1,000 cacao producers (about 600 treatment and 400 control) from the target population within the four priority departments Huila, Caldas, Nariño, and Tolima.

Question 47. “30 agricultores estadounidenses + asociaciones comerciales” ¿Cuántas asociaciones comerciales?

"30 American Farmers + Trade Associations" How Many Trade Associations?

Answer: The ToR indicate that the baseline evaluation will include approximately 30 survey responses from U.S. stakeholders, including American farmers and trade associations involved in the relevant agricultural sectors. However, the ToR does not prescribe a specific number of trade associations within this group of 30 respondents. Instead, the figure represents the total expected sample across both categories U.S. farmers and relevant trade associations or industry representatives.

Question 48. Diseño del Muestreo. ¿La información de identificación, localización y contacto de estos actores será suministrada por la entidad?

Sampling Design. Will the identification, location, and contact information of these actors be provided by the entity?

Answer: Please review the answer to question number 12.

Question 49. Assuming Cadmium is naturally occurring in the soil, what are the mitigation strategies to reduce Cd in cacao?

Assuming Cadmium is naturally occurring in the soil, what are the mitigation strategies to reduce Cd in cacao?

Answer: According to the ToR, the contracted evaluation firm is expected to review and make use of existing documentation and secondary data sources relevant to the AMCA project and the Colombian cacao sector. These sources may



include project design documents, sector studies, government statistics, previous research, and other relevant datasets that can help inform the evaluation design and analysis. At the same time, the ToR indicates that Counterpart International will provide relevant project documentation and available information to the selected firm to support the evaluation process.

Question 50. There are surveys for Colombian financial beneficiaries and for SMEs. Both surveys list SMEs as survey participants. Will these be different SMEs for each survey, or might they overlap?

Answer: Table 2 in section "11. Sample Size" establishes a sample size of 100 for the 3 categories. The established sample size must allow for the "purpose of the tool" defined in the same table.

Question 51. Will KIIs be with Colombian financial institutions and MFIs? As per the RFP, p 21, KII participants, it is not clear if they will be Colombian or US.

Answer: Financial institutions must be Colombian with a presence in at least one of the departments within the geographical scope of the Project.

Question 52. Besides Spanish, what local languages would be needed for data collection?

Answer: Data collection in Colombia will be in Spanish.

Question 53. What is the nature of farmer associations? Are there any formalized farmer cooperatives? Will the project work with farmer associations to formalize them into cooperatives?

Answer: Farmers' associations must be formalized. The project will confirm its scope with the associations, based on the Baseline results, to ensure the achievement of the established objectives.

Question 54. What monitoring and tracking systems does the project currently use that will be used to help manage the evaluation data? (pg. 10)

Answer: According to the Terms of Reference, the AMCA project does not yet have a fully operational project monitoring system generating evaluation data at the time of the baseline. Instead, one of the objectives of the baseline study is to assess the existing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, data platforms, and feedback mechanisms that will support project learning and adaptive management.

Question 55. Looking ahead to the midterm, does Counterpart anticipate issuing separate RFPs at each evaluation milestone, or is there an intention to engage a firm to partner across the multiple evaluations?

Answer: According to the ToR, this procurement is specifically for the baseline evaluation of the AMCA project, which will be conducted by an independent third-party evaluation firm selected through a competitive process, in accordance with USDA Food for Progress monitoring and evaluation requirements. The ToR does not specify arrangements for the midterm or final evaluations at this time. As a result, the current RFP covers only the baseline study, and no determination has



been made regarding whether the same firm will be engaged for future evaluation milestones.

Question 56. Experience with U.S. Government–Funded Programs. Could you please clarify whether prior experience with programs such as USDA Food for Progress, McGovern-Dole, or other U.S. Government–funded initiatives constitute a mandatory eligibility requirement for this solicitation? If so, kindly indicate the minimum years of experience and minimum contract value that offerors must demonstrate in order to satisfy this requirement.

Answer: Per section I.2.1, experience with USDA Food for Progress, McGovern-Dole, or other U.S. government evaluations is one of the minimum eligibility requirements. However, there is no minimum number of years of experience or minimum contract value for this specific requirement.

Question 57. Experience of the Proposed Team. Could you please clarify whether the experience of the proposed implementation team, particularly senior experts (e.g., Country Director or Team Leader), in conducting mixed-method evaluations in agricultural value chains or rural development in Colombia within the past five (5) to ten (10) years, may be considered complementary to or equivalent to the institutional experience of the offeror for eligibility or evaluation purposes?

Answer: According to the ToR and the Instructions to Offerors, proposals will be evaluated based on the qualifications and experience of both the offeror (firm) and the proposed evaluation team. The document indicates that the selected organization will be responsible for implementing the baseline study and that the evaluation team must demonstrate relevant technical expertise and experience appropriate to the assignment. In this context, the institutional experience of the firm remains an important consideration, particularly in demonstrating the organization’s capacity to manage and deliver evaluations of similar scope and complexity. At the same time, the qualifications and experience of key personnel such as the Team Leader or senior experts are also assessed as part of the technical proposal, especially where their expertise relates directly to mixed-methods evaluations, agricultural value chains, rural development, or work in Colombia.

Question 58. Experience with the U.S. Department of State. Would experience obtained through projects funded by the U.S. Department of State, particularly those related to migration and population programs, be considered valid as experience working with U.S. Government agencies for purposes of meeting the eligibility requirements referenced in the RFP?

Answer: No, per section 1.4.A.Tech 1.i), Requirement 3, the required experience must be with USDA Food for Progress, McGovern-Dole, or other U.S. Government evaluations.”

Question 59. Proposal Submission Templates. Could you please confirm whether specific templates or annexes must be used for the submission of the following proposal components?

- Technical Proposal



- Cost Proposal / Budget
- Institutional References

If such templates exist, we would appreciate it if you could share the corresponding files (Word or Excel) or indicate where they can be accessed or downloaded.

Answer: No, there are no specific templates for the proposal components except for the “Minimum Past Experience Requirements Table” referred to in Tech 1 that must be used by all offerors.

Question 60. Exchange Rate Reference for Budget Preparation. For the preparation of the financial proposal, could you please confirm which official exchange rate source should be used to convert costs into U.S. dollars (USD)?

Answer: Please use the exchange rate published by Banco de la República (available at this link: <https://www.banrep.gov.co/es/glosario/tasa-cambio-trm>), indicating the corresponding date.

Question 61. Minimum Experience Requirements. Could you please clarify whether there is a minimum number of comparable evaluations or studies that offerors must demonstrate in order to meet the eligibility requirements specified in the RFP?

Answer: There is no minimum number of comparable evaluations.

Question 62. Experience in Other Agricultural Value Chains. Would experience conducting evaluations in other agricultural value chains or rural development sectors (for example, coffee, Amazonian fruits, natural ingredients, or similar sectors) be considered relevant and acceptable for meeting the experience requirements related to value chain evaluations?

Answer: According to the Terms of Reference, the selected evaluation firm should demonstrate relevant experience conducting evaluations of programs related to agricultural development, value chains, rural livelihoods, and market systems, particularly those that involve mixed-methods approaches and engagement with multiple stakeholders across the value chain. While direct experience in the cacao sector may be advantageous, the ToR emphasizes the importance of methodological rigor and experience with agricultural value chain analysis and program evaluation, rather than limiting eligibility strictly to cacao-specific experience. Therefore, offerors may present experience from related agricultural sectors or value chains as evidence of their capacity to conduct the baseline evaluation described in the RFP.

Question 63. Sample Size and Distribution. The RFP indicates a sample of 1,000 producers. Could you please clarify whether this figure is a fixed requirement or an illustrative estimate that may be adjusted by the offeror based on the proposed methodology and statistical justification?

Answer: According to the ToR, the baseline evaluation includes an illustrative sample size of approximately 1,000 cacao producers, including both treatment and comparison groups. This figure is provided to guide offerors in understanding the



expected scope of the baseline survey. However, the ToR also specifies that the independent evaluation firm will be responsible for determining the final evaluation design and methodological decisions, including sampling strategies, data collection methods, and analytical approaches.

Question 64. Treatment and Control Groups. Has the treatment and control group structure already been defined within the AMCA project, or is the evaluator expected to propose the strategy for identifying and defining these groups during the evaluation design phase?

Answer: According to the ToR, the contractor is expected to develop and submit a technical proposal that clearly demonstrates how the baseline study will achieve the objectives outlined in the RFP. This includes presenting a sound evaluation methodology, sampling strategy, data collection plan, analytical framework, and workplan aligned with the evaluation questions and project indicators. The ToR specifies that the independent evaluation firm will be responsible for all methodological decisions, including the evaluation design, sampling approach, data collection methods, analysis, and reporting.

Question 65. Geographic Scope of Implementation. Could you please confirm whether a preliminary list of municipalities or intervention areas within the four target departments is available and could be shared? Access to this information would support the design of the sampling strategy and the estimation of fieldwork logistics and associated costs.

Answer: There is no preliminary list of municipalities; only the four departments designated for the project have been determined. It is expected that the Baseline results will help to identify the specific municipalities and rural communities that will enable the project to achieve its objectives.

Question 66. Access to Project Documentation. Will the selected evaluation firm have access, during the inception phase, to key project documents such as the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan, the detailed Theory of Change, or other monitoring tools that could support the refinement of the methodological design and data collection instruments?

Answer: Yes. Counterpart may share additional information required for the development of the Baseline that is not confidential.

Question 67. Availability of Sampling Frames or Beneficiary Lists. For the design of the producer and value chain actor sampling strategy, does the AMCA project currently have preliminary beneficiary lists or sampling frames (e.g., producer associations, enterprises, or other relevant actors), or is the evaluator expected to develop these sampling frames as part of the methodological design?

Answer: According to the ToR, the independent evaluation firm will be responsible for developing the methodological design of the baseline **study**, including the sampling strategy and identification of appropriate respondents. At the same time, the ToR indicates that the AMCA project team will provide relevant project



documentation and available information and will support the evaluator in locating participants and stakeholders as needed during the evaluation process.

Question 68. Level of Detail Expected in the Methodological Proposal. Considering the page limits established for the technical proposal, could you please clarify the expected level of methodological detail in the proposal? Specifically, should offerors include preliminary data collection instruments and detailed sample calculations, or will these elements be expected to be developed more fully during the inception phase?

Answer: According to the Terms of Reference and the Instructions to Offerors, the technical proposal should present a clear and well-structured methodological approach describing how the baseline study will be implemented. This includes outlining the proposed evaluation design, sampling approach, data collection methods, and analytical framework to demonstrate that the offeror understands the scope of the assignment and has the technical capacity to achieve the objectives of the baseline evaluation. However, the ToR also indicates that the independent evaluation firm will finalize the methodological details during the inception phase, including refining the sampling strategy, developing and validating the data collection instruments, and preparing the detailed implementation plan.

Question 69. Primary vs. secondary data sources. To what extent is the baseline study expected to rely exclusively on primary data collection versus the use of existing secondary data sources (e.g., project records, partner databases, or national statistics)?

Answer: According to the ToR, the baseline evaluation is expected to rely primarily on primary data collection through a mixed-methods approach, including producer surveys, key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), and field observations to establish baseline values for the project indicators and to answer the evaluation questions. At the same time, the ToR anticipates that the evaluation will also make use of relevant secondary data sources, such as existing sector studies, government statistics, project documentation, and other available datasets, where appropriate. These sources may help contextualize the findings and complement primary data collected during the study.

Question 70. Sampling frame for producer surveys. Will the project provide a sampling frame (e.g., lists of target producers or beneficiaries), or is the consultant expected to independently develop the sampling frame for the survey component?

Answer: According to the Terms of Reference, the independent evaluation firm will be responsible for developing the methodological design of the baseline study, including the sampling strategy and identification of survey respondents. At the same time, the ToR specifies that the Counterpart project team will provide relevant documentation and available information and will support the evaluation in locating participants and stakeholders during the evaluation process.



Question 71. Use of data from previous USDA-funded initiatives. Will datasets or beneficiary registries from previous or ongoing USDA-funded initiatives in the target regions be available to inform the sampling strategy or contextual analysis?

Answer: No, Counterpart does not have access to this information.

Question 72. Survey instruments and database structure. Is the consulting team expected to design the survey instruments and database structure, or will the project provide standardized questionnaires or templates aligned with USDA monitoring and evaluation requirements?

Answer: According to the ToR, the independent evaluation firm will be responsible for designing the data collection instruments and the overall methodological approach for the baseline study. This includes the development of survey questionnaires, qualitative interview guides, and the structure of the datasets required for analysis and reporting.

Question 73. Consortium applications. Are consortium applications permitted under this RFP, and if so, should one organization act as the lead contractor responsible for contractual and reporting obligations?

Answer: Yes, per section 1.4.A. Tech 5, subcontracting arrangements are allowed. For the case of Consortiums one organization must act as the lead contractor, responsible for contractual and reporting obligations and for managing the relationship with Counterpart.

Question 74. Subcontractors or technical partners. Is it acceptable for the lead bidder to include subcontractors or technical partners (such as universities, research institutions, or specialized survey firms) as part of the implementation team?

Answer: Yes, per section 1.4.A. Tech 5, subcontracting arrangements are allowed. Please make sure to fully address the information required in this section for subcontractors.

Question 75. Regulatory and ethical compliance. Are there specific compliance requirements associated with USDA-funded research (for example data protection standards, informed consent procedures, or Institutional Review Board approval) that bidders should incorporate into the study design?

Answer: Offerors must comply with Counterpart's ethical standards available here: [EthicsPoint - Counterpart International](#), and with the Government of Colombia personal data protection policy. Offerors are responsible for ensuring compliance with all relevant local regulations and institutional requirements, including IRB approval if required.

Question 76. Pregunta sobre la implementación práctica del grupo de control. En los Términos de Referencia se indica que el estudio de línea base incluirá 600 productores beneficiarios (grupo de tratamiento) y 400 productores no beneficiarios (grupo de control) dentro de los departamentos priorizados por el proyecto. En caso de que ambos grupos se encuentren ubicados en las mismas regiones de



intervención, agradeceríamos contar con mayor claridad sobre el enfoque previsto para la implementación práctica de este diseño.

En particular, quisiéramos confirmar:

- Riesgo del” Efecto de Derrame” del grupo de control: Si los productores del grupo de control se encuentran en las mismas zonas geográficas que los beneficiarios del proyecto, ¿qué mecanismos ha previsto el programa para evitar el posible “Efecto de Derrame” del grupo de control? es decir, que estos productores puedan acceder indirectamente a actividades, servicios o beneficios del proyecto durante el período de implementación
- Manejo operativo durante el trabajo de campo: En el contexto del levantamiento de información en campo, donde los productores suelen preguntar por los objetivos del estudio y su posible participación en el proyecto, ¿existen lineamientos específicos del programa sobre cómo abordar la comunicación con productores identificados como grupo de control, particularmente en relación con su eventual participación futura o su exclusión de las actividades del proyecto?

Question about the practical implementation of the control group. The Terms of Reference indicate that the baseline study will include 600 beneficiary producers (treatment group) and 400 non-beneficiary producers (control group) within the departments prioritized by the project. In the event that both groups are located in the same intervention regions, we would appreciate greater clarity on the approach envisaged for the practical implementation of this design.

In particular, we would like to confirm:

- *Risk of the "Spillover Effect" of the control group: If the producers in the control group are located in the same geographical areas as the project beneficiaries, what mechanisms has the program provided to avoid the possible "Spillover Effect" of the control group? that is, that these producers can indirectly access activities, services or benefits of the project during the implementation period*
- *Operational management during fieldwork: In the context of field information gathering, where producers often ask about the objectives of the study and their possible participation in the project, are there specific programme guidelines on how to approach communication with producers identified as a control group, particularly in relation to their eventual future participation or exclusion from project activities?*

Answer: The ToR indicates that the baseline evaluation will include approximately 1,000 cacao producers, consisting of around 600 producers expected to participate in project-supported activities (treatment group) and 400 comparable non-beneficiary producers (comparison group). The inclusion of a comparison group is intended to support tech evaluation design by establishing reference conditions for assessing project progress over time.



Regarding the potential risk of spillover effects: The ToR recognizes that the evaluation will take place within the same priority departments Huila, Caldas, Nariño, and Tolima, where project activities will occur. The comparison group is therefore intended to consist of producers who are not direct beneficiaries of project interventions during the baseline period. The exact procedures for identifying and maintaining a suitable comparison group will be refined during the inception phase, when the evaluation firm finalizes the sampling strategy in coordination with Counterpart and reviews the project's implementation plans.

Regarding the communication with producers during fieldwork: The ToR states that the evaluation firm will conduct the baseline study independently, while Counterpart will provide logistical coordination and support in locating participants and stakeholders. During data collection, the evaluation team should clearly explain that the purpose of the study is to collect information about current conditions in the cacao value chain, and that participation in the survey does not imply inclusion or exclusion from future project activities.

Question 77. Pregunta sobre el tiempo asignado al trabajo de campo. De acuerdo con el cronograma preliminar presentado en los Términos de Referencia, el estudio contempla diversas etapas metodológicas que incluyen la elaboración del Inception Report, el desarrollo y validación de instrumentos, la preparación logística del trabajo de campo, y posteriormente el análisis de datos y elaboración del informe final.

- Considerando el tamaño de muestra previsto para el estudio —incluyendo encuestas a productores, entrevistas a informantes clave, grupos focales y visitas de campo en diferentes departamentos— quisiéramos confirmar si existe flexibilidad en la distribución del tiempo entre las diferentes fases del estudio.
- En particular, agradeceríamos saber si sería posible optimizar o reducir la duración de algunas de las etapas iniciales del proceso (por ejemplo, desarrollo y revisión del Inception Report o preparación de instrumentos) con el fin de destinar un período mayor al trabajo de campo, idealmente de al menos cuatro semanas, lo cual permitiría asegurar una cobertura adecuada de las regiones de estudio y una mayor calidad en la recolección de información.

Question about the time allocated to fieldwork. According to the preliminary schedule presented in the Terms of Reference, the study contemplates various methodological stages that include the preparation of the Inception Report, the development and validation of instruments, the logistical preparation of the fieldwork, and subsequently the analysis of data and preparation of the final report.

- *Considering the sample size planned for the study – including producer surveys, interviews with key informants, focus groups and field visits in different departments – we would like to confirm whether there is flexibility in the distribution of time between the different phases of the study.*
- *In particular, we would appreciate knowing whether it would be possible to optimize or reduce the duration of some of the initial stages of the process*



(e.g. development and revision of the Inception Report or preparation of instruments) in order to allocate a longer period of time to fieldwork, ideally at least four weeks, which would ensure adequate coverage of the study regions and a higher quality of information collection.

Answer:

- The ToR provide an indicative timeline for the main deliverables and phases of the baseline study; however, the detailed sequencing and allocation of time across the different stages of the study are expected to be proposed by the evaluation firm as part of the technical proposal and refined during the inception phase. As indicated in the ToR, the independent evaluation firm is responsible for the methodological design and operational planning of the evaluation, including decisions related to data collection logistics, fieldwork organization, and analytical processes.

Question 78. Solicitud de aclaración – Tamaño de las unidades productivas. En la Sección II – Beneficiary Overview, el documento menciona que el 98% de las familias productoras de cacao cultivan aproximadamente 5 hectáreas.

Con el fin de asegurar la consistencia metodológica del estudio de línea base, agradeceríamos aclarar lo siguiente:

- ¿Debe el estudio considerar este valor (≈ 5 hectáreas) como un criterio o límite de techo o piso es decir los agricultores con más de 5 has entrarían o no al muestreo?

Lo anterior es relevante ya que, en la práctica, el tamaño de las unidades productivas puede variar significativamente entre productores y regiones, por lo que asumir un tamaño predeterminado podría no reflejar adecuadamente la realidad del sector.

Request for clarification – Size of the production units. In Section II – Beneficiary Overview, the document mentions that 98% of cocoa-producing families cultivate approximately 5 hectares.

In order to ensure the methodological consistency of the baseline study, we would appreciate clarifying the following:

Should the study consider this value (≈ 5 hectares) as a criterion or limit of ceiling or floor, that is, farmers with more than 5 hectares would or would not enter the sampling?

This is relevant since, in practice, the size of production units can vary significantly between producers and regions, so assuming a predetermined size may not adequately reflect the reality of the sector.

Answer: The reference to approximately 5 hectares is provided for contextual purposes and should not be interpreted as a strict inclusion criterion, ceiling or floor for the sample. The baseline study should aim to capture a representative range of cocoa-producing households in the target areas, including producers with smaller



or larger production units where relevant. The specific sampling approach and criteria for inclusion should be proposed by the offeror as part of their methodology to ensure a representative and robust baseline.

Question 79. Solicitud de aclaración – Participación de asociaciones y productores de nueces de EE. UU. en el estudio. En la Tabla de herramientas de evaluación se menciona la realización de un “American Farmer & Trade Association Survey”, dirigido a productores de nueces de EE. UU. y asociaciones sectoriales como la National Confectioners Association (NCA), American Peanut Council, California Almond Board y California Walnut Board.

Entendemos que el proyecto busca fortalecer el comercio agrícola bilateral entre Colombia y Estados Unidos, incluyendo oportunidades para exportaciones de productos agrícolas estadounidenses hacia el sector de confitería colombiano.

Con el fin de asegurar una adecuada formulación metodológica del estudio de línea base, agradeceríamos mayor claridad sobre los siguientes puntos:

- ¿Cuál es el alcance específico esperado del análisis relacionado con productores y asociaciones de nueces de EE. UU. dentro del estudio de línea base?
- ¿Se espera que el equipo consultor realice directamente la recolección de información con estos actores en Estados Unidos (por ejemplo, mediante encuestas o entrevistas), o esta información será proporcionada por el Counterpart o por las asociaciones sectoriales mencionadas?
- En caso de requerirse levantamiento directo de información, agradeceríamos confirmar el mecanismo previsto para facilitar el acceso y la coordinación con estos actores.

*Efecto de Derrame (Spill Over Effect) : se refiere a los impactos indirectos que una intervención genera fuera del área o grupo estipulado, personas que no participan de un proyecto se ven afectadas positiva o negativamente por él.

Request for clarification – Participation of U.S. walnut associations and producers in the study. The Assessment Tools Table mentions the conduct of an "American Farmer & Trade Association Survey" for U.S. walnut producers and industry associations such as the National Confectioners Association (NCA), American Peanut Council, California Almond Board, and California Walnut Board.

We understand that the project seeks to strengthen bilateral agricultural trade between Colombia and the United States, including opportunities for exports of U.S. agricultural products to the Colombian confectionery sector. In order to ensure an adequate methodological formulation of the baseline study, we would appreciate more clarity on the following points:

- *What is the expected specific scope of analysis related to U.S. walnut producers and associations within the baseline study?*



- *Is the consulting team expected to directly collect information from these actors in the United States (e.g., through surveys or interviews), or will this information be provided by the Counterpart or by the aforementioned industry associations?*
- *If direct information is required, we would appreciate confirming the mechanism envisaged to facilitate access and coordination with these actors.*

**Spill Over Effect: refers to the indirect impacts that an intervention generates outside the stipulated area or group, people who do not participate in a project are positively or negatively affected by it.*

Answers: According to the ToR, the AMCA project aims to strengthen bilateral agricultural trade between the United States and Colombia, including improving the competitiveness of Colombian cacao while expanding opportunities for U.S. agricultural exports such as edible nuts to the Colombian market.

Scope of analysis related to U.S. producers and associations: Within this context, the baseline study is expected to collect information on the current level of market linkages, trade relationships, and perceptions among U.S. agricultural stakeholders involved in sectors relevant to the confectionery industry. This includes understanding existing trade dynamics, opportunities for expanding exports, and barriers affecting trade between the two countries. The information gathered from U.S. farmers and trade associations will help establish baseline conditions for bilateral trade engagement and market awareness prior to project implementation.

Responsibility for data collection: The ToR indicate that the independent evaluation firm is responsible for conducting the data collection required for the baseline study, including surveys or interviews with relevant stakeholders' groups identified in the evaluation design. This may include respondents from the U.S. such as farmers, buyers, or trade associations with the relevant agricultural sector.

Access and coordination with U.S. Stakeholders: The ToR also specifies that the evaluation firm will receive logistical support from the AMCA project team, including assistance in locating and contacting relevant stakeholders where appropriate. Counterpart and project partners may therefore facilitate introductions or provide available contact information for relevant actors; however, the evaluation firm will remain responsible for implementing the data collection and stakeholder engagement required for the study.

Question 80. Experience with U.S. Government Agencies. Does experience with programs such as USDA Food for Progress, McGovern-Dole, or other programs funded by U.S. Government agencies constitute a mandatory eligibility requirement for this call?

If so, could you please clarify:

- The minimum number of years of experience required, and
- The minimum contract value that must be demonstrated?



Answer: Please refer to answer to question 56.

Question 81. Experience of the Implementing Team. Can the experience of the implementing team, particularly the organization’s director or team leader, in conducting mixed-method evaluations in agricultural value chains or rural development in Colombia within the last 5–10 years, be considered complementary or equivalent to institutional experience for eligibility or evaluation purposes?

Answer: Please refer to answer to question 57.

Question 82. Experience with the U.S. Department of State. Would experience acquired through projects funded by the U.S. Department of State, particularly those related to migration or population programs, be considered valid experience working with U.S. Government agencies for the purposes of meeting the eligibility requirements?

Answer: Please refer to answer to question 58

Question 83. Experience with Implementing Partners of U.S. Government Programs. Would experience obtained through contracts or subcontracts with organizations implementing U.S. Government-funded programs (such as Chemonics International Inc., FINTRAC, or Partners of the Americas) be considered valid to demonstrate experience working with U.S. Government agencies?

Answer: Yes, as long the experience with US government funded programs is on evaluations. Please refer to Requirement 3 in section I.4.A.Techn 1.

Question 84. Proposal Submission Templates. Could you please confirm whether there are specific templates or annexes that must be used for the following components of the proposal:

- Technical Proposal
- Cost Proposal / Budget
- Institutional References

If available, we would appreciate it if you could share the corresponding templates (Excel or Word) or indicate where they can be downloaded.

Answer: Please refer to the answer to question 59.

Question 85. Exchange Rate for Budget Preparation. For Colombian offerors preparing the financial proposal in USD, what official exchange rate reference source would you recommend using?

Answer: Please refer to the answer to question 60.

Question 86. Participation in Multiple Proposals. Can the same organization participate as a lead applicant in one proposal and as a partner or subcontractor in other proposals within the same call, or are there any restrictions regarding multiple participation?

Answer: No, it is not possible. Doing so undermines independent competition and triggers organizational conflicts of interest.

Question 87. Minimum Number of Similar Projects. Is there a minimum number of similar evaluations or studies that must be demonstrated to meet the eligibility criteria?



Answer: Please refer to answer to question 61.

Question 88. Experience in Other Agricultural Value Chains. Is experience in other agricultural or rural development value chains (e.g., coffee, natural ingredients, livestock, or others) considered valid to meet the experience requirement in value chain evaluations?

Answer: Please refer to the answer to question 62.

Question 89. Sample Size and Distribution. Is the sample of 1,000 producers mentioned in the RFP a mandatory requirement, or is it an indicative estimate that may be adjusted by the offeror based on methodological design and statistical justification?

Answer: According to the ToR, the baseline evaluation will include approximately 1,000 cacao producers, consisting of about 600 producers expected to participate in project-supported activities (treatment group) and 400 comparable non-beneficiary producers (comparison group). However, the ToR also specifies that the independent evaluation firm will be responsible for determining the methodological design of the evaluation, including the sampling approach and the criteria used to identify respondents within the treatment and comparison groups

Question 90. Definition of Treatment and Control Groups. Has the project already defined treatment and control groups, or will the evaluator be expected to propose the strategy for identifying these groups during the evaluation design phase?

Answer: According to the Terms of Reference, the baseline evaluation will include approximately 1,000 cacao producers, including around 600 producers expected to participate in AMCA-supported activities (treatment group) and 400 comparable non-beneficiary producers (comparison group). However, the ToR also specifies that the independent evaluation firm will be responsible for determining the detailed methodological design of the evaluation, including the sampling strategy and the operational criteria for selecting respondents within both groups.

Question 91. Access to Project Information. Will the evaluation team have access during the inception phase to key project documents such as the MEL Plan, Workplan, Cooperative Agreement, and beneficiary databases, in order to refine the methodology and data collection tools?

Answer: Please refer to the answer to question 66.

Question 92. Coordination with the Project MEL Team. What level of coordination is expected between the independent evaluator and Counterpart's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) team during:

- Methodological design
- Data collection
- Indicator validation

Answer: According to the Terms of Reference, the baseline evaluation will be conducted by an independent third-party evaluation firm, which will be responsible



for all methodological decisions, including the evaluation design, sampling approach, data collection methods, analysis, and findings. This structure is intended to safeguard the independence and credibility of the evaluation in line with USDA M&E policies. At the same time, the ToR outlines that Counterpart's MEL team will provide coordination and technical support throughout the evaluation process. This collaboration includes providing relevant documentation, supporting access to stakeholders and participants, and reviewing key deliverables.

Question 93. Exact Geographic Coverage. Is there a preliminary list of municipalities or intervention zones within the four priority departments that could be shared to facilitate the sampling design and logistical cost estimation?

Answer: Please refer to the answer to question 65.

Question 94. Language of Deliverables. Should the baseline study deliverables (reports, presentations, and datasets) be submitted exclusively in English, or is a Spanish version also expected for national stakeholders?

Answer: All deliverables must be submitted in English and the final report must be submitted in both Spanish and English

Question 95. Data Collection Instrument Templates. Will Counterpart or USDA provide standard templates for data collection instruments (e.g., surveys, interview guides), or is the evaluation team expected to develop them entirely during the design phase?

Answer: According to the ToR, the independent evaluation firm will be responsible for developing the data collection instruments required for the baseline study, including quantitative surveys and qualitative interview guides. The evaluator is expected to design these tools as part of the methodological approach proposed for the evaluation.

Question 96. Coordination with International Stakeholders. Will Counterpart facilitate contact or coordination with U.S.-based actors (buyers, associations, producers) mentioned in the evaluation design?

Answer: Please refer to the answer to question 25.

Question 97. Expectations Regarding Econometric Analysis. Is the quantitative analysis expected to include advanced econometric models or causal inference methods, or would a robust descriptive analysis aligned with project indicators be sufficient?

Answer: According to the ToR, the baseline evaluation will employ a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collection to establish baseline conditions for the project indicators and to answer the evaluation questions related to the cacao value chain, market access, finance, and trade dynamics. The ToR does not prescribe the use of specific advanced econometric models or causal inference techniques for the baseline analysis. Instead, the independent evaluation firm is responsible for determining the most appropriate analytical methods as part of the evaluation design, ensuring that the analysis is methodologically sound and aligned with the objectives of establishing credible baseline values for project indicators.



Question 98. Participation in Future Evaluations. Would the consulting firm or evaluation team selected to conduct the baseline evaluation face any restrictions in participating in future consultancies related to the project, such as midline or final evaluations, due to potential conflict-of-interest considerations?

Answer: The consulting firm or evaluation team selected to conduct the baseline evaluation will not face any restrictions in participating in future consultancies related to the project, including potential midline or final evaluations.

Question 99. Definition of Geographic Universe. Has the project already defined the geographic universe of intervention (departments and municipalities), or is the consulting team expected to refine this during the methodological design phase?

Answer: According to the ToR, the geographic scope of the project has been defined at the departmental level, with project interventions focused on four priority departments in Colombia: Huila, Caldas, Nariño, and Tolima. These regions were selected based on their strong potential for specialty cacao production, relatively lower cadmium levels, and the presence of value chain infrastructure and private-sector partners. However, the ToR does not specify a finalized list of municipalities within these departments for the purposes of the baseline evaluation. The identification and confirmation of specific municipalities and producer communities will occur during project implementation and the evaluation inception phase, when the sampling strategy and fieldwork plan are finalized.

Question 100. The RFP notes that “a true experimental impact evaluation is not feasible” and that the baseline will employ a non-experimental design incorporating a comparison group where feasible. However, the sampling section specifies 600 treatment farmers and 400 control farmers, which suggests a quasi-experimental design. Could Counterpart please clarify whether the evaluation is expected to implement a quasi-experimental design (e.g., difference-in-differences using treatment and control groups) or whether the comparison group is intended primarily for descriptive benchmarking purposes?

Answer: According to the ToR, the geographic scope of the project has been defined at the departmental level, with project interventions focused on four priority departments in Colombia: Huila, Caldas, Nariño, and Tolima. These regions were selected based on their strong potential for specialty cacao production, relatively lower cadmium levels, and the presence of value chain infrastructure and private-sector partners. However, the ToR does not specify a finalized list of municipalities within these departments for the purposes of the baseline evaluation. The identification and confirmation of specific municipalities and producer communities will occur during project implementation and the evaluation inception phase, when the sampling strategy and fieldwork plan are finalized.

Question 101. If the evaluation is expected to employ treatment and control groups, could Counterpart clarify how treatment farmers will be identified for baseline sampling, whether a beneficiary list or sampling frame will be made available to the evaluator,



and whether the evaluator is expected to define and select the control group independently?

Answer: According to the ToR, the baseline evaluation will include approximately 1,000 cacao producers, consisting of about 600 producers expected to participate in project-supported activities (treatment group) and 400 comparable non-beneficiary producers (comparison group). The ToR also specifies that the independent evaluation firm will be responsible for determining the methodological design of the evaluation, including the sampling strategy and procedures used to identify respondents within the treatment and comparison groups.

Question 102. Given that AMCA interventions involve value chain actors, market linkages, SPS systems, and private-sector partnerships, some activities may generate spillover effects beyond directly supported farmers or enterprises. Could Counterpart clarify how the project anticipates maintaining meaningful separation between treatment and control groups in this context? Specifically, should offerors assume that the comparison group will consist of non-participating producers in the same departments, or is the expectation that evaluators identify geographically or institutionally distinct comparison groups to minimize spillover effects?

Answer: According to the ToR, the baseline evaluation will include a comparison design consisting of approximately 600 producers expected to participate in project-supported activities (treatment group) and 400 comparable non-beneficiary producers (comparison group). The ToR also indicates that the evaluation will be conducted within the four priority departments Huila, Caldas, Nariño, and Tolima, where project interventions will take place. At the same time, the ToR emphasizes that the independent evaluation firm is responsible for determining the detailed methodological design of the evaluation, including the sample strategy and criteria for selecting treatment and comparison producers.

Question 103. The RFP specifies a ceiling of USD \$165,000 while also requiring a substantial data collection effort, including 1,000 producer surveys, 100 access-to-finance surveys, SME and U.S. buyer surveys, 8–10 FGDs, 17–20 KIIs, 30 field observations, and fieldwork across four departments. Given the scope of data collection and the expectation of a rigorous mixed-methods baseline design, could Counterpart confirm whether the \$165,000 ceiling is strictly fixed, or whether proposals exceeding this amount may be considered if offerors provide a clear justification linked to the scope of work and methodological rigor?

Answer: Per section I.4.B “Cost Proposal,” “The total Cost Proposal should not exceed a ceiling of USD\$165,000.

Question 104. The RFP notes that survey data must be entered into Excel with double-entry procedures. Could Counterpart clarify whether electronic data collection platforms (e.g., SurveyCTO, Kobo, or ODK) are acceptable in lieu of manual data entry and double-entry protocols?

Answer: According to the ToR, the evaluation firm is responsible for designing and implementing the data collection and data management approach, including ensuring data quality and reliability. The ToR references requirements related to



data entry and quality control (e.g., double-entry procedures) as part of ensuring data accuracy. At the same time, the ToR does not restrict the evaluation firm to a specific data collection modality. Therefore, the use of electronic data collection platforms (e.g., SurveyCTO, Kobo, ODK, or similar tools) is acceptable, provided that the proposed approach includes appropriate data quality assurance mechanisms equivalent to or stronger than traditional double-entry procedures.

Question 105. Could Counterpart clarify whether the minimum eligibility requirements are expected to be met by the prime offeror alone, or whether relevant experience within the proposed evaluation team (including subcontractors) may be considered in determining eligibility?

Answer: The minimum eligibility requirements should be met by the Offeror. If the execution of work to be performed by the Offeror requires the hiring of subcontractors, the subcontractors' experience could be taken into consideration when assessing the offeror's minimum eligibility requirements. Evaluation will be based solely on the offeror's institutional experience, not on the experience of any proposed personnel.

Question 106. The RFP indicates separate page limits for specific technical proposal sections (e.g., Corporate Capabilities – 3 pages; Methodology – 10 pages; Team Composition – 8 pages). Could Counterpart confirm whether these are separate limits for each section rather than a single combined page limit for the entire technical proposal? Additionally, please confirm whether CVs, the Gantt chart, and subcontracting arrangements are excluded from page limits.

Answer: That is correct; page limits are separate limits for each section. As stated in Tech 3, CVs do not count against the maximum page number of those sections. The Gantt Chart (Tech 4) and the Subcontracting arrangement (Tech 5) sections do not have a page limit.

Question 107. Should proposals include elements such as a cover page, table of contents, or acronym list? If included, please confirm whether these are required or optional and whether they count toward page limits.

Answer: A cover page, table of contents and acronym list are not required. However, including these will facilitate Counterpart's review of offerors' proposals. If included, the cover page, table of contents and acronym list won't count toward page limits.

Question 108. The RFP includes a template cover letter but does not specify where it should appear in the submission package. Could Counterpart confirm whether the cover letter should be included as part of the technical proposal or submitted as a separate document, and whether it counts toward page limits?

Answer: Per Annex 4 "Offer Checklist", Offerors must follow the checklist's order when assembling the proposal, with the Cover letter being submitted as a separate document. The cover letter does not count toward any of the page limits.



Question 109. The RFP states that proposals should include a technical proposal, cost proposal, and references and should be submitted by email. Could Counterpart confirm whether these components should be submitted as separate attachments within a single email submission or as separate emails?

Answer: Please submit a single email with 4 separate attachments: Cover page, Technical Proposal, Cost Proposal, and Professional references.

Question 110. Does conducting the baseline evaluation create any restriction for the selected firm or organization to participate in future project-related consultancies or activities, such as a midterm evaluation, final evaluation, or other technical services due to conflict of interest policies?

Answer: Please review the answer to question 98.

Question 111. Is it possible for the consulting team to propose refinements or adjustments to the geographic scope of the intervention as part of the methodological proposal if the sampling design or field conditions justify this?

Answer: According to the ToR, the geographic scope of the AMCA project has already been defined at the departmental level. The project's interventions and the baseline evaluation are expected to focus on four priority departments in Colombia: Huila, Caldas, Nariño, and Tolima, which were selected based on factors such as specialty cacao potential, lower cadmium levels, and the presence of relevant value chain infrastructure and private-sector partners. Within this defined geographic framework, the independent evaluation firm is responsible for determining the detailed methodological design, including the sampling approach and the selection of municipalities and respondents within the target departments.