Cocoa Farming/Production In Nigeria.

(How to start & make money)
Our forefathers in Nigeria lived in the era of cocoa production and exportation and (funny enough), they were having better economy selling cocoa, than we have now selling oil.

Cocoa farming and exportation could be awakened again and that’s the reason why we’re writing this post, to enlighten you about the opportunities in cocoa production business.
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Introduction & a Brief History of Cocoa Farming in Nigeria

Before the oil boom in Nigeria, there was cocoa, which we banked on as one of our major cash crops exports. Nigeria was then the biggest exporter of cocoa in Africa and ranked amongst the top exporters in the world.

Then the oil came, and the agricultural sector was abandoned and poor agricultural management became rampant. Cocoa farming, along with other cash crop farming, took a back seat to the exploration of oil.

Nigeria quickly lost our international market to countries such as Indonesia and Cote D’Ivoire.

Fondly called the wealth seed, discerning Nigerian farmers are now returning to the cultivation of cocoa on an industrial scale. However, cocoa production is still under-exploited, as global demand still surpasses supply by a huge margin. And while cocoa is not the easiest of crops to manage, farmers with the requisite knowledge, enthusiasm and patience to run and manage cocoa farms can benefit in the long run, and become the new crop of self-made millionaires.

The Top 10 Cocoa Producing Countries in the World

In the past, Nigeria topped the list of cocoa producing countries. It lost its position as a result of the oil boom and exploration. In recent times however, it has taken up cocoa production again, and currently ranks as the world’s fourth principal cocoa producer.

According to the Cocoa Association of Nigeria (CAN), Nigeria ranks behind Cote D’Ivoire (1st), Ghana (2nd) and Indonesia (3rd). Together, Ghana, Nigeria, and Cote D’Ivoire supply more than two-thirds of the world’s cocoa.

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The top 10 cocoa producing countries in the world (as of today) are;

1. Ivory Coast
2. Indonesia
3. Ghana
4. Nigeria
5. Cameroon
6. Brazil
7. Ecuador
8. Mexico
9. Dominica Republic
10. Peru

Top Cocoa Producing States in Nigeria

The top cocoa producing states in Nigeria are;

1. Ondo state
2. Cross River state
3. Ogun state
4. Akwa Ibom state
5. Edo state
6. Ekiti state
7. Delta state
8. Osun state

Cocoa Seed and Tree
The taxonomic name for cocoa is *Theobroma cacao*. It is a small perennial tree crop that primarily comes from three tropical regions; West Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. It usually ranges in height between four and eight metres.

While cocoa is a tropical crop, it doesn’t do too well in the sun and is usually cultivated in the shade of other crops such as oil palm, rubber and banana, and/or in the shades of fruit trees such as avocado, breadfruit, guava, mango, orange and coconut.

The cocoa fruit is an egg-shaped pod, and is usually coloured red or brown. It typically contains between thirty and forty seeds, each of which is surrounded by a bitter-sweet white pulp. When cocoa seeds are dried and fermented in the sun they are brownish red, and are known as cocoa beans/seeds.

## Uses of the Cocoa Products

Chocolate is the best known product of the cocoa seed. The first recorded evidence of chocolate as a food product goes back the Mayans and Aztecs who made a drink from the beans of the cocoa tree. Chocolate was known as a beverage until the nineteenth Century when “eating chocolate” was made.

Another well-known product of the cocoa seed is cocoa powder, used as an ingredient in almost any foodstuff. It is used in chocolate flavoured drinks and desserts such as ice cream. It is also used for chocolate spreads and sauces, and cakes and biscuits.
Cocoa is also used to produce cocoa butter, an ingredient extensively used in cosmetic products such as moisturising soaps and creams. Cocoa is also used to manufacture cocoa liquor, jam and marmalade.

Fresh cocoa pulp juice is often used in the production of soft drinks and alcohol.

The crushed shells or pod husks of cocoa beans can serve as organic fertiliser, as natural deterrents to weeds, and are used to minimise erosion. When pelletised, the husk can also be used as animal feed, while potash from the husk can be used for soft soap manufacture.

**Why Cocoa Farming in Nigeria**

Cocoa farming in Nigeria now presents one of the best investment opportunities to local investors in agribusiness, as cocoa remains one of the fastest selling agricultural products in the international market.

Of course, you cannot compare the turnover (profit) on cocoa with other agriculture business like vegetable farming and Nigeria has more land for cocoa (probably) than for rice farming.

Since the international demand for cocoa produce is high, it makes simple business sense to get into a business where demand greatly surpasses supply, as it means that every product cultivated has a ready market.

Another reason for cocoa farming in Nigeria is because it is a perennial crop that can survive for many decades. Once planted and nurtured to maturity, farmers can harvest from a cocoa tree for many years.

My father’s cocoa plantation is probably over 40 years old and till date, some people (he sold the farm for when he retired from farming) are still making money from that cocoa farm.

While initial cultivation can be a hassle, once mature, cocoa trees could be a source of income for the farmer for 40 years or more.

**How to Start a Cocoa Farming Business in Nigeria**

There are certain factors to consider when starting a cocoa farm:
Basic requirements for a Successful Cocoa Farming

It goes without saying that one of the first steps to take when setting up a cocoa farm is to locate a large expanse of land. The farmer must locate a large expanse of good land with the appropriate climate conditions and with a good steady rainfall supply.

Of course, the farmer must invest in good quality, disease-resistant, and high-yielding cocoa beans for planting.

Best Climate conditions for Cocoa Farming in Nigeria

Cocoa farming can only be done under very specific climate conditions. Cocoa trees do not like too much sun, and its natural habitat is under the heavy rainforest canopy. That’s the reason why you’ll not want to start a cocoa farm in the northern part of Nigeria.

You’re planning to start a cocoa farm in Kano, Kaduna or Abuja? You’re joking.

Cocoa farm would only do well in states like Ondo, Ogun, Rivers, Cross River, Osun, Oyo, Ekiti, Imo, I mean, all the western, Eastern and Southern states of Nigeria where there are much rain and not much sun.

When cocoa is just cultivated on a commercial scale, the farmer must make sure he can reproduce this climatic condition by planting the trees under the shade of crops such as oil palm, rubber, banana, mango, orange and coconut trees. This will ensure that the direct heat of the sun is not borne by the cocoa pods.

The trees need a consistent climate: temperatures of 21 to 32 degrees Celsius year round — never lower than 15 C, and 100 to 250 cm of rainfall, and well distributed throughout the year.

Soil best conditions for cocoa production

As with climatic conditions, the cocoa tree grows only under specific soil conditions. The trees require a deep, slightly acidic, moist soil. The soil should contain coarse particles and have a depth of around 1.5 metres to allow for the development of a good root system.
The soil for cocoa farming should be well drained because while cocoa can withstand waterlogging for a short period of time, it will have a detrimental effect in the medium and long term. While well-drained, such soil must also have good water retention as the cocoa tree is also sensitive to a lack of water/drought.

The soil should have a high organic matter content, and certain anionic and cationic balances, while optimum nitrogen/phosphorous ratio should be around 1.5.

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Other requirements production

To begin cocoa farming, the investor also needs to purchase a storage and drying space. Most cocoa farmers own warehouses to give the cocoa seeds the safekeeping needed, and this store needs to have enough space outdoors to spread and dry the seeds. The seeds need to be dried in the sun to be useable and the drying period usually takes two weeks.

Other relevant equipment needed are scales for weighing, heavy duty and normal-sized sack, and water proof material for drying the seeds in the open air.

Varieties of the Cocoa Trees

Before 1950, there were two main varieties of cocoa planted in Nigeria; the Amelonado cacao and the Trinitario varieties.

These days however, there are several varieties of the cocoa planted and cultivated in Nigeria. They are:

**The Criollos**: This is considered the finest and most luxurious of cocoas. It very well dominated the international market in the 18th century, but only very few pure Criollo trees remain. Nigeria has a small share of these Criollo trees. The seed is hardly bitter and is only mildly acidic. It has a mild cocoa taste with striking secondary tastes of fruits, tobacco and nuts. This is a breed that is more susceptible to pests and fungal diseases, and a breed that has smaller yields when compared to other cocoa breeds. It is also the most expensive breed.
The Forasteros: This is a very robust and hardy breed of cocoa, a breed that accounts for more than eighty per cent of global cocoa cultivation. It is however not as aromatic as Criollo, and can in most cases have a bitter and/or acidic taste. It has a hard and rough back and is the most common breed cultivated in Nigeria.

The Trinitario: This is a breed derived from crossing Criollos and Forasteros. It combines the robustness of the Forastero with the powerful aromatic cocoa taste of the Criollo.

Cocoa Breeding

There are different ways to breed a cocoa tree. The most commonly used method is seeding.

Seeding: In this process, the cocoa tree is raised primarily from seeds. Beans are taken from pods within 15 days of harvest and are planted, adhering to the soil and climatic conditions required. Such seeds will usually germinate and produce good plants.

Budding: Here, a bud is cut from a matured preferred tree and placed under a flap of bark of another tree. This is bound with raffia and waxed tape of clear plastic to prevent loss of moisture. When the bud begins to grow, the old tree above it can be cut off and discarded.

Cutting: Under this method, the farmer takes tree cuttings with an average of three and four leaves and one or two buds. The leaves are then cut in half and the cutting is placed in a pot under polythene until roots begin to grow. Once it starts to grow, it is transplanted to the farm.

Marcotting: Here, the farmer removes a strip of bark from a branch and covers the area with sawdust and a polythene sheet. This area will thereafter produce roots and the branch can then be chopped off and replanted in the farm.

Cocoa Planting and Maturity

Cocoa nursery is usually done between October and January, while field transplanting is done between April and June.
After cocoa seeds are planted, it usually takes between three and five years to yield the first crop. Cocoa Hybrid varieties however can yield crops within two and three years.

In the recent past, experts in Nigeria started working on developing an early-maturing, high-yielding, disease-resistant beans to help double the country’s production.

**Advantages of Going into Cocoa Farming in Nigeria**

There are many advantages of beginning a cocoa production business in Nigeria. Some of these are:

- Cocoa produce is the fastest selling agricultural produce in the world, and global demand still far exceeds supply.
- Cocoa production will help to contribute to Nigeria’s GDP and move the country from its dependency on the oil industry.
- Cocoa farming is a very profitable business.
- Cocoa production will lessen the unemployment scourge in Nigeria.

**Challenges of the Cocoa Production in Nigeria**

It goes without saying that there is no business venture with no risks, cocoa farming included. Here are some of the risks involved in beginning a cocoa farm:

As it takes time, effort, patience and energy, it might be overwhelming for the newcomer.

Cocoa farming requires a constant watch out for diseases and rodents/pests, and the farmer has to constantly take protective and preventive measures.

The initial capital outlay for cocoa business is very high i.e. it is initially capital intensive.

**Other Important Tips for Great Cocoa Production in Nigeria**

**Cocoa Business Market research**
The intending farmer must do his own market research. The price of cocoa seeds doesn’t fluctuate so much, but the farmer must be able to determine through market research who his potential clients are, and determine/fashion out ways to reach them.

You May Join the association

The Cocoa Association of Nigeria (CAN) is an association formed to meet the peculiar needs of cocoa farmers, stakeholders, development and others partners in ensuring the sustainability and development of the sector. It is advisable for every cocoa farmer to join in, as CAN fosters collaboration for growth, and empowers farmers by fostering technology transfer, knowledge transfer, and business development. It also works to promote knowledge and development by undertaking, promoting and encouraging scientific research aimed at improving the yield and quality of cocoa.

Understudy other cocoa farmers

Sometimes the best way to learn a business/trade is to understudy someone who is already in the business. Intending farmers are encouraged to understudy other farmers for at least one cycle of production to learn how the business is done.

Keep on learning

Of course, the place of knowledge cannot be overemphasized. In our technological world today, farmers must keep up to date on the development of more disease resisting species, growing methods, and generally learn how to run their businesses in a more efficient manner.

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CONCLUSION

Cocoa farming has more advantages than drawbacks, but the responsibility still rests on the cocoa farmer to make a success of his farm. He/she must be ready to go the distance, put in hard work, and has to continually educate himself/herself on best practices in order to take advantage of modern scientific breakthroughs and business knowledge to run his/her business successfully.
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