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World Cocoa Foundation Partnership Meeting in Guayaquil, Ecuador, to Focus on Needs of Cocoa Farming Families in Latin America

Improved Farming Practices, Productivity and Market Potential are Discussed at Foundation's First Partnership Meeting Held in Latin America

VIENNA, VIRGINIA AND GUAYAQUIL, ECUADOR - The World Cocoa Foundation will welcome nearly 300 participants to its Partnership Meeting on May 21-22, 2008, in Guayaquil, Ecuador, the first held in Latin America. Focused on the needs of the cocoa farming families in Latin America, the two-day meeting will include presentations on innovation and improved farming practices, productivity, biodiversity and conservation, pest and disease control, as well as commercial and marketing opportunities.

Minister of Agriculture, Honorable Walter Poveda Ricaurte, Mayor Jaime Nebot Saadi, City of Guayaquil, and Patricia Sheikh, Deputy Administrator, United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Service, Office of Capacity Building and Development, will deliver the Meeting's Opening Address. More than 40 other speakers will participate over the two days. Commenting on the Partnership Meeting, Bill Guyton, President, World Cocoa Foundation, said, "This meeting is a milestone both for the World Cocoa Foundation and for the global cocoa and chocolate industry. It is the first Partnership Meeting held in Latin America since the Foundation was established. Importantly, it brings together farmers, industry, non-governmental organizations, government officials and scientists from over 20 countries who are focused on the potential of sustainably grown cocoa to significantly improve the economic well-being and quality of life of farmers in the region and globally."

Cocoa originated in the Amazon basin, where it has played a significant economic and social role for nearly 2,500 years. Today, 500,000 farm families in Latin America depend upon this important crop for their livelihood. Typically grown on smallholder farms of between one and two hectares (2.5 – 5 acres) in size, cocoa faces such challenges as significant loss due to pests and disease, poor productivity, and relatively few farmer associations and cooperatives. Karl G. Walk, Blommer Chocolate Company and Chairman, World Cocoa Foundation, said, "Cocoa has the potential to dramatically improve the lives of many thousands of smallholder farmers

across Latin America, as well as in West Africa and Asia. For this potential to be realized, however, these farmers need practical skills and information about better crop management and post-harvest handling and help in organizing themselves into healthy cooperatives to better market their crop. This is where the World Cocoa Foundation, its partners and programs are playing such a critically important role, empowering and helping these farmers succeed over the long term.”

Today, the World Cocoa Foundation and its 67 member companies actively support the Andean Countries Cocoa Export Support Opportunity (ACCESO) program in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. Using the successful Farmer Field School model to train farmers as well as its other technical assistance programs, ACCESO is improving the competitiveness of the region’s cocoa crop across the supply chain, from farmers to exporters and manufacturers, and is increasing the number of farming households producing market-quality cocoa.

About the World Cocoa Foundation

Established in 2000, the World Cocoa Foundation is a leader in promoting economic and social development and environmental stewardship in 15 cocoa-producing countries around the world. With nearly 70 member companies from the Americas, Europe and Asia, the Foundation actively supports a range of farm-level programs harnessing sustainable agriculture practices to improve the quality of life for the millions of smallholder farmers growing this unique crop. For more information about the World Cocoa Foundation, visit: www.worldcocoafoundation.org.

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