
CAOBISCO Proposal on Improvements to the Cocoa Contract

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Current commercial cocoa contracts basically require that cocoa beans be fermented, dry, reasonably uniform in size and free from smoky, hammy and other abnormal odors. They must also be reasonably free from flat beans, germinated beans, fragments and pieces of shell, reasonably free from insect, rodent or any other type of infestation and virtually free from foreign matter and adulteration.

But the procedures for determining whether or not these criteria are met are rudimentary at best. The good fermented contract requires that there should be no more than 5 percent visibly moldy or insect-damaged beans and no more than 5 percent slaty beans. In addition it provides for the measurement of the average bean size, expressed in terms of the number of beans per 100 grams. There are no standard methods for determining uniformity of bean size, dryness, uniformity of quality or the quality of the fat.

Such a contract might be acceptable and workable if farmers were to consistently harvest, ferment and dry their cocoa in line with recommended practice; if the beans were then bagged and graded locally so that any mixing represented no more than a blend of properly prepared cocoas coming from broadly similar trees at the same time of year; and if the cocoa was then stored properly and exported without any subsequent loss of integrity.

It is, however, totally unacceptable today that many farmers are not preparing their cocoa properly, that cocoa is often moved to port before grading and that cocoas of widely different qualities and bean size are

blended to the limits which the current contracts allow.

The primary fault for this state of affairs is due largely to the cocoa processing and chocolate industries, which have not clearly set out in the purchase contracts key quality criteria and the methodology for determining whether or not these criteria have been met.

This paper is intended as a means of setting out such criteria. It is recognized that, in practicality, all the criteria may not be met immediately. But they indicate the direction the industry has to move, and set out clearly for farmers, and everyone involved in the cocoa trade, the quality requirements necessary to meet consumers' needs and the increasing demands of legislation on food and raw materials.

These criteria are not, in fact, difficult to achieve. They will be comfortably met by good farming practices. They do not require significant investment or additional inputs. What they do require is care, in particular in consistency of treatment, and awareness by all involved of the standards required.

The key cocoa quality criteria for both the pressing and chocolate industries are the absence of undesirable off-flavors, the quality of the cocoa fat in the bean, uniformity of bean size and uniformity of quality as measured by the cut test.

As previously indicated, the current standard commercial contracts already stipulate that cocoa shall be free from smoky, hammy and other abnormal odors, dry and reasonably uniform in bean size. However, they do not specify the objective criteria and the methodology