

CocoaLink Mobile Technology Program to Expand into Côte d'Ivoire

Posted May 29, 2013

The CocoaLink mobile technology program, developed and launched by Hershey in 2011, is expanding into Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast).

The expansion of CocoaLink, a collaboration among government and industry, will create a free information exchange for all Ivorian farmers with mobile phones. The announcement of the CocoaLink expansion was made by Conseil Café-Cacao (CCC) of Côte d'Ivoire, the Ivorian government agency that will administer the program in Côte d'Ivoire. The CCC expects 30,000 Ivoirians to enroll initially and 100,000 to be in the network by 2016.

About 70 percent of the country's 800,000 cocoa farmers already use mobile phones, with service across all the country's cocoa regions. CocoaLink will provide free weekly SMS and voice messages to farmers based on the cocoa-growing calendar in Côte d'Ivoire, which is the world's leading producer of cocoa.

CocoaLink connects farmers with instant access to agricultural experts who can address questions in real time about disease and pest control or best applications fertilizer. This represents an important step in farmer outreach because many cocoa communities are in isolated regions where agriculture extension services may be limited.

CocoaLink is part of Hershey's 21st Century Cocoa Plan, a roadmap for how all of Hershey's cocoa programs come together to help cocoa communities around the world grow sustainable cocoa for the next century.

"Our 21st Century Cocoa Sustainability Plan focuses on modernizing cocoa farming to improve the lives of farmers and their families, said Andy McCormick, Vice President, Cocoa Sustainability. "CocoaLink is the first mobile phone program - supported jointly by Hershey and the Ivory Coast government - to provide actionable farm and health information through free SMS and voice messages and two-way feedback with farmers and experts. There are 800,000 cocoa farmers in Ivory Coast and more than two in three are already using mobile phones. This is a great opportunity for Hershey, as a responsible industry leader, to ensure long-term, high-quality cocoa while improving cocoa communities in West Africa."

Modernizing Cocoa Farming

CocoaLink will use voice and SMS text messages delivered in [two] local languages and French to farmers. The information exchange will support farming outreach services and help connect farmers to extension agents for personalized information.

Cocoa farmers can also use CocoaLink as an early warning system to identify and respond rapidly to invading pests or diseases. CocoaLink messages are developed by CCC and other cocoa experts based on information requests from farmers.

CocoaLink will complement government initiatives to modernize cocoa farming by creating awareness of the best ways to plant, prune or fertilize cocoa trees. CocoaLink supports safe farming practices based on Côte d'Ivoire national child labor laws as well as health and education information to help cocoa communities develop. The CocoaLink information exchange will also focus on women and women farmers through farm, financing and social messaging well-being of cocoa households.

Industry Working Together

CocoaLink was formed through a unique public/private partnership that includes the World Cocoa Foundation and Orange, which is providing mobile phone support for farmers in Côte d'Ivoire, the world's largest cocoa grower.

Hershey is also working with other industry partners on the CocoaLink expansion, including Barry Callebaut, Bloomer, Cadbury Ghana, Cargill Ghana, Nestle, and Olam, Transmar. Hershey provided initial funding for CocoaLink in 2010. Other CocoaLink supporters include ANADER (Agence Nationale d'Appui au Developpement Rural), World Education and International Cocoa Initiative and the Grameen Foundation.

“As an innovative technology platform, CocoaLink shows how companies are working collaboratively and creatively with West African governments to modernize cocoa farming and meet growing global demand for cocoa-based products,” said Bill Guyton, president of the World Cocoa Foundation. “We know that applying modern techniques improves cocoa crop yields by more than 30 percent and CocoaLink will accelerate farmer learning and good practices.”

In addition to farming and social messages, CocoaLink also provides malaria prevention and business and financial training. Since being introduced in Ghana in two years ago, CocoaLink has provided more than 300,000 farmer SMS messages, enrolling 18,000 farmers - 35 percent of whom are women - in 550 rural communities.