

## History

During the 1990s, the cacao region of Southern Bahia, Brazil, faced a severe crisis caused mainly by the infestation of the plantations with the fungal disease of “witch’s-broom”, and low prices of cacao beans on the international market. The majority of the farms were abandoned and the employees dismissed because of the low yield of the activity.

In search of alternatives for the crisis, work was focused on sustainable cacao production. IESB - Instituto de Estudos Socio Ambientais do Sul da Bahia, and CI - Conservation International, developed demonstrative actions of organic production and commercialization, and organized a group of farmers who already presented greater sensitivity to the question, that is, that they did not use synthetic fertilizers, insecticides, or other harmful products. As result of this initiative, farmers obtained a yet unprecedented fact in the region: certification of their production and establishment of international commercial contacts and direct exportation of organic cacao at a differentiated price.

With the success of this experience, this group fortified and felt motivated to institutionalize their actions, leading to the creation of the Cooperative of the Organic Producers of Southern Bahia at the end of the year 2000. To stress the commitment of this group with sustainable development of the region, the name CABRUCA was chosen. This word is used for the traditional cacao culture, where remaining native trees of Atlantic Rainforest are kept in order to shade the cacao plants. This system contributes to the conservation of biodiversity of one of the most threatened ecosystems of the world forming a composed sustainable landscape with linked forests and agro-forestry systems. The name CABRUCA has come to be considered the symbol for the objectives of this new cooperative, that searches to produce, conserving the Atlantic Rainforest.

Through organic certification carried through by IBD - Instituto Biodinâmico de Desenvolvimento Agrícola, recognized by the IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) and DAR (Deutscher Akkreditierungsrat), CABRUCA leads project IBD BA - 036, that currently congregates sixtythree members, farmers of small, middle, and large size, and a land reform settlement with 25 families. All are certified organic producers or in the process of conversion.

Beyond promoting the cacao organic production, CABRUCA stimulates its members to diversify their production with fruits and spices in agro-forestry systems. Besides, there is a constant process of environmental adequation of the farming areas with registration of Legal Reserves (by law 20% of any rural property), resetting of Areas for Permanent Preservation (by law: e.g. steep slopes and river banks), with support of non-governmental organizations. Some members have directed part of their land towards recognition as Private Reserves of Natural Patrimony - RPPN.

In resume, the cooperative’s current proposal is to guarantee the recovery and growth of agro-forestry farming based on better prices and sustainability:

- Selling on the specialized market for organic products;
- Establishing “unique” standards of quality for its products;
- Encouraging the enrichment of traditional plantations;
- Stimulating the diversification of the production;
- Training its associates;
- Aggregating value to its products through agro-industrial processing (cacao, palmito, banana, cupuaçu, pineapple, papaya and others).

CABRUCA represents a replicable model of development for the cacao region, contemplating effective environmental monitoring and sustainable socio-economic development. The consequence of its actions can be observed with the adhesion of more and more farmers of the region to certified organic production and CABRUCA.