

About

The Chain Collaborative is a US-based non-profit organization whose mission is to co-create opportunities and strengthen capacities for community-led change in the coffee sector. In addition to our community-led development work, we consult for mission-driven organizations and companies in the tropical agriculture and development space, train coffee and other professionals in sustainability through virtual coursework, and innovate across value streams via collaborative projects. For many assignments, we team up with other consulting firms to offer a variety of services to a diverse client base in order to leverage each other's expertise and enhance outputs for clients.

Our Services

Supply Chain Research

We develop and conduct social science research, both primary and secondary, on a variety of topics. We design research methodologies and implementation plans, and provide data analysis services. We produce literature reviews, conduct interviews and focus groups, and create final reports with recommendations.

Program/Project Design, Development, and Management

We design new or reform existing programs or projects for organizations and companies to strengthen sustainability outcomes, based on shared tools and frameworks. We also provide dedicated training, manage programs and projects remotely, and work alongside field staff.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

We design monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks that support organizations and companies to report on and evaluate the implementation and impact of their programs and projects. We develop internal structures for data collection and impact reporting, and train field staff in new protocols.

Sustainability Assessment and Reporting

We develop and execute comprehensive analyses for organizations and companies, focusing on the impact of their sustainability actions and investments. To help clients communicate those actions and investments, we design annual reporting approaches and structures, and train staff to conduct sustainability reporting independently as well as improve programming over time.

Custom Services

We offer bespoke opportunities to a diverse client base, ensuring we are able to meet their specific needs. Past assignments have included grant and proposal writing for new and existing programming, and training to staff in grant prospecting, among others.

Areas of Expertise

- Qualitative and Quantitative Research and Analysis
- Data Presentation and Visualization
- Strategy Advisory and Development
- Project and Program Design, Management, and Evaluation
- Proposal and Report Writing
- Workshop Design and Implementation
- Virtual Staff Training
- Community-Led Approaches
- Market-Based Approaches

Principal Consultants

Nora Burkey

Nora is the Founder and Executive Director of The Chain Collaborative. She has designed and now leads the organization's Consulting, Education, and Collabs program, which has led to a variety of partnerships and consulting opportunities throughout many tropical agricultural sectors, coffee in particular. She holds a master's degree in Sustainable Development from School for International Training and has special expertise in qualitative research design and analysis; monitoring, evaluation, and learning design; and community-led program design. In recent years, her consulting work has focused on decarbonization in the coffee sector, voluntary sustainability reporting for companies, and key performance indicator development. In addition to consulting, she has experience with curriculum design for diverse audiences, having co-developed the Specialty Coffee Association's Coffee Sustainability Program, and having designed and launched a Sustainability Reporting course for Coffee Knowledge Hub. She excels at written communications and reporting, and also brings an important intersectional approach to her work, with an educational background in gender in development and food systems. She speaks both English (native) and Spanish fluently.

Carolina Pirola

Carolina is a researcher and communications specialist with previous experience in journalism. Based in Madrid, Spain, she holds a bachelor's degree in Journalism from Rey Juan Carlos University and a master's degree in International Relations from Queen Mary University of London. A personal interest in coffee and sustainability led her to investigate coffee farming communities in the Canary Islands and northern Argentina, which launched her into a career in the coffee sector. She currently serves as the Programs and Evaluation Lead at The Chain Collaborative, where she manages the Community-Led Development Incubator for Latin America and Africa, as well as the organization's monitoring, evaluation, and learning system. She has been active on a number of consulting assignments, with specific expertise in desk research and qualitative data analysis. She is fluent in both Spanish and English (both native).

Past Experience

Global Water Center (2026)

Global Water Center is a nonprofit organization founded by Water Mission in 2020 to strengthen the global water sector through capacity development and technical assistance. They equip governments, utilities, non-governmental organizations, and water professionals with the knowledge, skills, and partnerships needed to design, operate, and sustain safely managed water systems at scale. In 2026, TCC supported Global Water Center to:

- Conduct background research on water security, sanitation and hygiene, and environmental pressures in Colombia, with a focus on the Caribbean coast
- Design and apply a quantitative and qualitative baseline assessment on water access, water use practices, hygiene behaviors, environmental risks, and local institutional capacities to manage water systems in 26 communities in Colombia's Caribbean coast
- Evaluate findings and develop recommendations for responsive action

Mountain Harvest (2025-2026)

Mountain Harvest is a Uganda-based specialty coffee exporter and service provider working alongside 3,000 smallholder farmers in Mount Elgon, Rwenzori, and Kigezi. They focus on coffee quality as well as measurable social, environmental, and economic impact for producer communities. At the end of 2025, Mountain Harvest contracted The Chain Collaborative to develop their first impact report:

- Analyzed data from the past eight years related to operations, reach, service provision, farmer livelihoods, unique projects, and business performance
- Developed and authored narrative report to showcase the company's growth and impact since their founding, and their expertise in the region
- Designed and produced the final graphic report for a wider audience, to be available in digital format

Conservation International (2024-2026)

Conservation International is a global organization that partners with the public, private, and civil society sectors to protect nature for the benefit of humanity. Their work spans more than 100 countries, and ensures that people and the planet thrive together. Since 2015, they have led Sustainable Coffee Challenge, a multi-stakeholder coalition uniting coffee sector actors to invest in action that will make coffee the first sustainable agricultural product in the world. On behalf of Conservation International, The Chain Collaborative:

- Led a multi-stakeholder initiative to establish carbon footprint baselines for coffee production in five Latin American countries
- Recruited 19 stakeholders to contribute in-kind to the study by deploying field teams for data collection
- Assessed and communicated project updates and results, and collaborated on study design and execution

Fairtrade International (Various)

Fairtrade International is a non-profit, multi-stakeholder association made up of 22 member organizations, including three producer networks and 19 national Fairtrade organizations. They coordinate activities for these associates and own the Fairtrade registered trademark. On behalf of Fairtrade International, The Chain Collaborative has been contracted for four different assignments:

Development of Agroecology Uptake Indicator Framework (2024-2025)

- Analyzed agroecology measurement frameworks and their alignment with legislative and voluntary reporting/due diligence
- Designed and led a qualitative research process to assess Fairtrade farmers' current uptake of agroecology in the coffee, cocoa, and banana sectors, including a desk review and stakeholder interviews
- Iterated an indicator framework for small producer organizations and farmers to report their uptake of agroecology, and designed and executed field testing methodology

Research on Deforestation and Forest Protection (2023-2024)

- Conducted desk research to analyze the drivers of deforestation and/or environmental protection in coffee and cocoa regions, and interventions that curb or limit deforestation
- Analyzed deforestation monitoring pilots
- Designed and led qualitative and quantitative research process to assess the impact of Fairtrade interventions on deforestation, gathering input from diverse stakeholder groups, including producer organizations and farmers across three countries

Development of Cost of Sustainable Production Template (2023)

- Analyzed cost of sustainable production (COSP) template for coffee and other strategy documents, and designed and led qualitative research process to gather stakeholder input
- Updated existing COSP template, adding indicators related to sustainability, living income, and Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence (HREDD)
- Designed and oversaw pilot process to test new updates in seven coffee-producing countries and revised COSP template based on feedback

Development of Global Climate Strategy (2022)

- Reviewed and analyzed current climate change strategy documents and connected with internal stakeholders to gather input on the development of a new strategy
- Designed and authored the new global strategy on climate change and the environment to guide the global network

Root Capital (2023-2024)

Root Capital serves agricultural enterprises throughout the Global South by providing credit and capacity-building services. By investing in community-based enterprises, they drive ongoing

improvements in farmer livelihoods and increase the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of farming communities. On behalf of Root Capital, The Chain Collaborative:

- Supported their grants management team to write status updates and reports for private, civil society, and public sector donors, including USAID
- Authored the 2024 annual report for the Women in Agriculture Initiative (WAI), a program to promote gender equity and inclusion; increase access to resources among rural women; and transform economies by unlocking finance for women-led and gender-inclusive businesses

IDH (2023)

Based in the Netherlands, IDH is a global organization focused on transforming agricultural markets to become more sustainable and inclusive. Active in more than 15 countries, they collaborate across international and national value streams to address the root causes and impacts of climate change, unfair wages, and social inequalities. On behalf of IDH, The Chain Collaborative:

- Researched the interaction between cost of production and volume, and how they drive income for smallholder farmers
- Developed an analysis framework to support supply chain actors to assess the potential impact of “production system” interventions (i.e., interventions that aim to adjust cost of production and volume to improve income)

The Nature Conservancy (2022-2023)

The Nature Conservancy is a global environmental non-profit organization active in 76 countries. As part of the Sustainable and Prosperous Communities program, of which The Nature Conservancy is a partner and convener, The Chain Collaborative was contracted to assess decarbonization opportunities for six value chains in Southern Mexico. In particular, we:

- Analyzed decarbonization commitments of 60 companies across the forestry, coffee, cocoa, cattle, ecotourism, and honey value chains, and assessed decarbonization opportunities based on value chain configurations
- Conducted qualitative interviews with key stakeholders to fill gaps in knowledge
- Determined strategic approaches to emission reduction in two of six value chains and created associated road maps in collaboration with community members in Southern Mexico

Eco-Micro of the InterAmerican Development Bank (2020-2023)

Root Capital, Sustainable Food Lab, The Chain Collaborative, and Cooperative Coffees came together for a three-year project, funded by IDB Lab, to pilot the use of the Cool Farm Tool (now Cool Farm Platform) in six coffee cooperatives across Latin America. As part of this project, The Chain Collaborative managed the following activities:

- Gender assessment of the use of the Cool Farm Tool to ensure equity in its application
- Collated the consortium’s recommendations for scaling carbon accounting throughout the industry, including its suggestions for premiums for carbon storage
- Conducted impact reporting and industry-facing communications about the project

Digital Coffee Future (Various)

Digital Coffee Future supports coffee sector actors to improve data management and digitalize their organizations and enterprises for enhanced performance. They provide advisory and research services, specialized learning opportunities, and educational resources. In partnership with Digital Coffee Future, The Chain Collaborative:

- Developed a monitoring and evaluation framework for their Digital Origin Education Program, an opportunity for coffee enterprises in producing countries to learn about digitalization and develop a digitalization plan
- Assisted on consultancies to i) review and analyze the flow of client processes, products, and information; ii) design flow maps to support the visualization of activities and key actors; and iii) assess digitalization goals and needs to develop digitalization strategies and roadmaps

Algrano (2021-2022)

Algrano leverages technology to provide direct trading services to both coffee producers and coffee roasters, allowing each party to work in direct collaboration with one another to source and sell sustainable coffees. On behalf of Algrano, The Chain Collaborative was contracted to:

- Design and execute a research process to survey and interview roasters and producers to assess market trends
- Analyze the results to author comprehensive report of findings, released for free to the broader coffee industry

Caravela (2021-2022)

Caravela is a Latin America-based specialty green coffee exporter and importer that sources coffee from seven different countries: Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Peru. On behalf of Caravela, The Chain Collaborative:

- Designed and executed a comprehensive research process to assess the company's sustainability efforts and impact, including a desk review and stakeholder interviews
- Authored a summary report and extensive list of recommendations with preliminary action steps for the company to take to advance their sustainability work

Specialty Coffee Association (2021-2022)

The Specialty Coffee Association is a global trade association dedicated to "making coffee better." They collaborate with value chain actors to publish research and standards, and provide education and networking events. In partnership with the Specialty Coffee Association, The Chain Collaborative:

- Designed a research methodology to assess the carbon reduction commitments and approaches of global coffee companies and led a research team to execute its four phases, including a literature review, desk review, interviews, and surveys
- Analyzed collated research to write and edit the final report with case studies
- Supported the design of the association's Coffee Sustainability Program, a four-class curriculum focused on social, environmental, and economic sustainability

JengaLab (2020)

JengaLab was founded by technology and international development experts. They work on a wide variety of projects to promote equitable and local tech entrepreneurship, and its integration with development projects. On behalf of JengaLab, The Chain Collaborative was contracted to:

- Author a fact-sheet for the European Union, as well as case studies, about the intersection between digitalization and gender equity

Equal Origins (Various)

Equal Origins works with producer organizations and other industry members to develop strategies and tools to advance gender equity in the coffee and cocoa value chains, and to ensure the prosperity of farming families. On behalf of Equal Origins (formerly the Partnership for Gender Equity), The Chain Collaborative has:

- Authored proposals for gender and youth programming and designed monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems for gender projects and participatory research
- Designed and implemented youth as well gender initiatives in East Africa and Latin America, and created toolkits to replicate programming in other contexts
- Oversaw and supported teams of researchers working on behalf of the organization to publish resources or explore new strategies

Publications (Sample Work Products)

- [Mountain Harvest 2025 Impact Report: Celebrating 8 Years of Quality Coffee and Impact](#), published by Mountain Harvest on March 30, 2026
- [Women in Agriculture Initiative \(WAI\) Annual Report](#), published by Root Capital on November 4, 2024
- [The Effect of Fairtrade on Forest Protection and Deforestation Prevention](#), published by Fairtrade International on September 17, 2024
- [Coffee and Coffee: GHG Emissions Reductions Progress and Strategies Across the Value Chain](#), published by the Specialty Coffee Association on October 17, 2022
- [Algrano Market Trends Review 2022: Coffee Sourcing and Production Trends in the Context of a New Price Boom](#), published by Algrano on April 18, 2022

References

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