

Surviving a Chocolate shortage

Description



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One gets a certain joie de vivre from the taste, scent and texture of chocolate.

We enjoy it when we feel jubilant, gorge on it when we feel sad, and dip strawberries in it at more amorous moments. It is hard to fathom a world without chocolate; no matter how healthy, broccoli simply won't do. After all, no one makes movies about sensible vegetables. Willy Wonka and the Asparagus Factory? No. No. No.

But alas, the world, once awash in this sweet and bitter pleasure, is approaching a shortage because we're eating too much of it, say chocolate makers Mars and Barry Callebaut. Last year, the world consumed more cocoa than growers could produce, and despite an unexpected crop of riches this year, demand outpaces supply. Together, European nations continue to consume the most chocolate, but the U.S. is a chocolate lover's paradise, feasting on about one-third of the world's inventory.

Experts point to several reasons for the desperate predictions. Drier weather in West Africa, the world's cradle of cocoa growing, and a fungal disease are factors. So are the changing tastes of

China, Brazil and India, where affection for the confection has soared in recent years â€” proof that you canâ€™t keep a lid on good things forever. With shortage comes an economic consequence â€” melt-in-your-mouth chocolate is going to cost more for less. Itâ€™s a chocoholicâ€™s nightmare.

CNBC reports that as cocoa prices climb toward record highs, chocolate makers might substitute cheaper ingredients, like palm oil or cottonseed oil, which could alter the taste. At the very least, candy bars that soldiers have used as currency or received as reminders of home could soon become luxury items. Countries like Switzerland and Belgium, known for their delicate chocolate-making touch, may be holding golden bars.

Where there is a will, there is a way, however. Scientists already are working on genetically modified chocolate, and, believe it or not, there is a cocoa genome database, a collaboration of several candy makers and university researchers to create new hardy strains. After all, this is a crisis, right? Weâ€™re glad we can count on science to ensure our supply of affordable cakes, candy bars, mousse, Easter bunnies, Valentine hearts, Halloween handouts and hot beverages with marshmallows on chilly days.

With a little trust, the worldâ€™s chocolate lovers should close their eyes, inhale deeply and calmly soldier on. Weâ€™ve endured shortages of coffee beans and, really, almost every other commodity. For the most part, markets eventually correct, so donâ€™t panic quite yet. It is, however, a fine time to savor chocolate in all of its many delightful forms.

We love our chocolate

How much of the worldâ€™s chocolate supply does each country consume?

United States 32.7%

Germany 11.6%

France 10.3%

United Kingdom 9.2%

Russia 7.7%

Japan 6.4%

Italy 4.6%

Brazil 3.7%

Spain 3.8%

Mexico 2.5%

Canada 2.6%

Poland 2.6%

Belgium 2.2%

SOURCE: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, International Cocoa Organization

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1. Factual
-

2. Information

Tags

1. Callebaut
2. Chocolate
3. Cocoa
4. Shortage
5. Survival

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