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CAN CHOCOLATE CHANGE THE WORLD?

The "Change Chocolate" Can and Is.

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2012.06.07



Photo courtesy of plant-for-the-planet.org

The kids at Plant-for-the-Planet, a movement of about 100,000 children who plant trees around the world for climate justice are showing the world just how chocolate can mitigate climate change and help humans and the planet to be and stay healthy.

Take for example, the production of chocolate. Producing 100g of chocolate causes 300g of carbon dioxide (CO₂), which gets released into the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide is a toxic, odorless and colorless greenhouse gas caused by practices like unsustainable agriculture and by burning fossil fuel. This causes global warming.

Environmental scientists warn that Polar ice caps are melting as a result of the greenhouse effect and this increases sea levels and causes floods to coastal areas while causing tides to rise. Moreover, in human beings, long or high exposure to carbon dioxide can cause labored breathing, headaches, and ultimately, suffocation due to the lack of oxygen.

Today about 6 million small scale farmers produce 95 percent of all the world's cocoa supply and most small farmers earn less than \$2 per day, so many of them do not make enough income to hire workers to help build their business.

After learning that most of the 2 million cocoa farmers' children—that is about 250,000 children who are exposed to hazardous work on cocoa plantations, instead of going to school. Felix Finkbeiner, the founder (at 9 years old) of Plant-for-the-Planet, thought up the idea with his peers to produce their own chocolate bar that is both fair to children and also carbon neutral.

So Plant-for-the-Planet's kids found Chocolats Halba, a Zurich based Swiss quality chocolates producer committed to sustainability and fair trade practices by partnering with small cocoa farmers, and Pur Projet, whose mission is to preserve the climate through reforestation and community forest conservation in tropical environments, are helping these small cocoa farmers through agroforestry practices, such as planting timber trees, whose wood can be sold at a higher price for furniture production, while offsetting CO₂ emissions for a longer time, while increasing the farmer family's income. Timber trees offer farmers 4-5 times more income than cocoa trees.

"We've called our chocolate "The Change Chocolate" says Felix and "we have convinced the first retailers to sell it. Part of the sales price of every chocolate bar goes towards the Plant-for-the-Planet Initiative to empower more children and to plant more trees."

"This chocolate is therefore produced exactly as we children would produce every product – fair and climate neutral. Think it the way chocolate can be produced can and is changing the impact chocolate-making is having on our planet... 250,000 were sold within the first 4 weeks, the chocolate is fair trade, carbon neutral and delicious", says a very excited Felix.

The Plant-for-the-Planet Children's Initiative was founded in January 2007. Inspired by the late environmental and political activist, Wangari Maathai, who planted 30 million trees in Africa.

Felix created a school presentation around the idea of planting trees to help the environment that has today developed into children setting out to plant one million trees in each country of the world to create a CO₂ balance.

These children are not waiting for governments and policy makers to agree to and implement a treaty of sorts to set off climate change, or for private companies or scientists to push existing or new technologies or vast projects ahead... they are taking action into their own hands by planting one tree at a time. As the Plant-for-the-Planet mantra states: Stop Talking, Start Planting, and that's what they're doing, and now setting out to plant one trillion trees.

The sweetest things in life don't have to be bad for you or the planet, so have some Change Chocolate, for a change.

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