# Cocoa prices rise, driving innovation in chocolate alternatives



Soaring cocoa prices are driving innovation in the confectionery market, leading to the emergence of cocoa-free chocolate alternatives. The continuing increase in cocoa prices poses challenges for chocolate manufacturers and consumers alike, spurring the development of new products that seek to fill the gap created by volatile cocoa availability.

As prices of cocoa and chocolate continue to rise—experiencing an average increase of 9% throughout 2024, and a staggering 300% jump in wholesale cocoa prices—chocolate production is becoming increasingly difficult for many companies. Richard Caines, a principal analyst at the food and drink market research firm Mintel, reported, "In January just gone, it's shot up by 14%." The rising costs are attributed in part to climate change affecting cacao farms in West Africa, combined with farmers shifting away from cocoa production towards more profitable ventures such as illegal gold mining, leading to a reported deficit of 500,000 tonnes of cocoa in the global market last year.

In response to these developments, a variety of cocoa-free alternatives have begun to make their way into the European retail sector. One such product comes from Italian firm Foreverland, which has developed a cocoa powder substitute called Choruba, sourced from carob husks. Massimo Sabatini, co-founder and chief executive of Foreverland, acknowledges the historical perception of carob that leaves much to be desired. "I recognise that carob really doesn't taste like chocolate," he said, while also noting the innovative fermentation and roasting processes the company employs to enhance its flavour profile and reduce sugar content. The processed carob alternative is lower in fat and boasts higher fibre content, appealing to health-conscious consumers.

Another notable player in the cocoa-free market is Planet A Foods, a German manufacturer creating an alternative called ChoViva, primarily based on sunflower seeds. Co-founder and chief technology officer Sara Marquart explained, "We process sunflower seeds like cocoa beans," highlighting the abundance of this ingredient. ChoViva currently features in around 35 different products, including chocolates made by Aldi in the UK, which are primarily peanut-based with the ChoViva coating.

In the UK, the start-up Nukoko is also making strides into this new sector, utilizing fava beans for their cocoa powder alternative. Co-founder Ross Newton noted, "We saw first-hand the issues with the chocolate supply chain," pointing to the company's aim of sourcing locally to reduce food miles. His team claims to capture approximately 24 of the 25 key flavour compounds found in traditional chocolate within their offerings. Though they acknowledge that achieving an identical flavour is complex, they are working towards this goal.

Feedback from taste tests indicates that while these cocoa-free alternatives may not fully replicate the taste of traditional chocolate, they present satisfactory textures and incorporate appealing flavours. The reviews highlight a varied flavour experience, with some products like ChoViva-covered popcorn being described as more chocolatey than others. "Anything new that comes out has got to meet equal taste expectations," Caines remarked, emphasising the challenge of convincing consumers to accept these alternatives.

As companies innovate in response to the challenges posed by increasing cocoa prices, the development of cocoa-free chocolate alternatives reflects a changing landscape in the confectionery market, where consumer preferences and supply chain issues will shape the future of sweet treats.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)