



The Cocoa Crisis

Cocoa prices have rapidly risen over the last year and are expected to remain elevated for the foreseeable future. At the same time, consumers are clamouring for budget-friendly and indulgent chocolatey comfort foods. This places manufacturers in a difficult position! While decreasing pack sizes and increasing retail prices is already occurring, manufacturers will need to find different cost reduction strategies to avoid consumer frustration.

Using cocoa alternatives such as carob is a potential strategy, as is reducing overall cocoa content in products. As always though, taste is king, and consumers will need to be satisfied that their favourite chocolate snack tastes as good as always.

- Climate change, crop disease, ageing cocoa trees and underinvestment are some of the top factors driving the cocoa crisis. (Mintel, 2025)
- 65% of consumers dislike chocolate brands raising their prices but keeping the product the same. (Mintel Consumer Data, UK, 2024)
- 50% of consumers have switched to own-brand chocolate because of rising prices. (Mintel Consumer Data, UK, 2024)
- New technologies are being used to create lab-grown cocoa ingredients that mimic cocoa's flavour and functionality. (Mintel, 2025)

On the Shelves



Pioppo Pop, Poplar Almonds. Almonds coated with Choruba - a tasty Italian alternative to chocolate. (Italy)



Sip Herbals, Pumpkin Spice Faux Joe. Uses carob for a chocolatey taste. (Canada)



Sainsbury's Chocolate Spread. This chocolate spread uses a mixture of cocoa powder and carob powder. (UK)



Rewe Markt, Waffle Bites. Made using ChoViva, a chocolate-alternative made with oats and sunflower seeds. (Germany)



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On the Shelves



ChoViva Dubai Bar. A chocolate-free take on the viral Dubai Chocolate Bar. Said to be creamy and crunchy with a chocolatey flavour. (Germany)



Voyage Foods, Hazelnut-Free Spread. A recreated classic, made without hazelnuts or cocoa, using entirely upcycled ingredients. (USA)



Caraboo Dairy and Gluten-Free Chocolate Bars. Said to taste 'ridiculously chocolatey' without using any cocoa powder - just carob, coconut and other natural ingredients. (UK)



Maz Foods, The Un-Chocolate Bar. Made using mesquite pods, an all-natural, sustainable ingredient with a rich chocolatey flavour. Said to "deliver all the indulgence of chocolate." (USA)

The rise of 'alt cocoa' or 'alt chocolate' is an exciting area of development to keep your eye on.

With cocoa prices set to remain high, brands must embrace a new era of lower cocoa formulations, cocoa-free products or even in the near future using lab-grown cocoa. For now, reformulating products to contain less cocoa will often be the simplest solution.

However, it's important to remember that reducing cocoa content impacts not only flavour, but also texture, colour and the overall sensory experience of a product. While reformulation is a sensible approach in this current environment, it is far from simple and must be considered holistically.



HW Hawkins Watts Offerings

- ✓ Chocolate Flavours and Cocoa Booster Flavours
- ✓ Caramelised Sugar Powders and Syrups
- ✓ Other flavours to achieve cocoa reduction
- ✓ Texture solutions to support cocoa reduction
- ✓ Yeast Extracts for natural flavour and enhanced cocoa notes
- ✓ Natural Colours

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