



# The World is Entering a Devastating Chocolate Crisis

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Attention in Washington remains focused on the government shutdown. But a far more important issue confronts America while the president and congressional leaders dither: rising chocolate prices. When will the government address this terrifying global crisis?

Cocoa trees have been cultivated for thousands of years. The early Mesoamericans, including the Aztecs and Mayans, turned the beans into cocoa solids, liquid, and butter. These peoples were serious about their chocolate, offering cocoa beans as gifts for the gods and using cocoa drinks in sacred ceremonies.

Both the Aztec and Mayan civilizations have gained a bad rap over the years because of military aggression and human sacrifice. But mass murder was a small price to pay for bequeathing chocolate to the rest of us.

The Europeans became acquainted with chocolate after the Spanish conquistadors came and conquered. The latter were a loathsome lot, ready to spill blood in pursuit of gold and glory. However, they sent cocoa beans as well as gold to Europe.

The Europeans added sugar and milk. The drink quickly became a favorite in Spain, and soon jumped the English Channel. The Europeans turned it into a common yet essential treat.

Hard chocolate finally arrived in the 18th century, apparently first in Italy. But it was the Industrial Revolution that delivered chocolate to the rest of us. A German company created the first chocolate bar in 1839. Is there another invention that benefited mankind so greatly?

But perhaps the most important innovation was yet to come. In 1867 a Swiss chocolatier, recently removed from candle-making added milk. And then America's Milton Hershey created a mass market with cheap chocolate bars.

How would we live without chocolate? Yes, there are a few malcontents and deviants who claim not to like chocolate. But that's fine since it leaves more for the rest of us.

For all of the genius of Thomas Jefferson, he failed to capture this aspect of humanity. What is "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" without chocolate?

Truly access to chocolate is a vital national, even global interest.

Now that access is threatened. The cost of one kilogram of chocolate has hit \$12.25, up 45 percent in 2007, the highest ever. It turns out cocoa beans are in short supply.

Even America's weak recovery has sparked a consumer return to the chocolate market, with consumption rising for the first time since the economic and financial crashes of 2008. The problem is worldwide. In Europe the cost of making a milk chocolate bar is up 31 percent. The same phenomenon is evident in Asia, where chocolate prices are up 30 to 40 percent this year.

"Most of our customers are not happy about it" said Richard Lee of Singapore-based Aalst Chocolate.

This is a crisis. A real crisis. No nonsense about world peace, international poverty, Islamic terrorism, or other minor problems. Chocolate is going to cost more!

This will be bad enough for casual consumers. It is far worse for chocolate addicts. After all, chocoholics can't help themselves.

What's a real chocolate lover to do?

It's time for the government to act. After all, for what do we have the government if not to act in a crisis like this? Vital national interests are at stake.

First, we need a Department of Chocolate. Second, we need to create a new welfare program to ensure that everyone has access to chocolate.

Third, we need price controls on chocolate. Why should greedy profiteers be able to take advantage of helpless chocoholics? We have a RIGHT to reasonably-priced chocolate.

Fourth, we need price supports for cocoa production. So what if that creates a surplus, like for cheese? It is simply impossible to have too much chocolate.

Fifth, we need a military policy based on guaranteed access to foreign cocoa. Some 70 percent of cocoa is produced in West Africa; 43 percent comes from Ivory Coast alone. Forget access to foreign oil and the Persian Gulf. We remain hopelessly dependent on foreign sources of cocoa.

Sixth, we need a new federal chocolate "czar" to coordinate a truly effective federal chocolate policy, covering both domestic and international issues.

Indeed, the neoconservatives have long suggested that Uncle Sam concoct some new grand crusade as a means of promoting national greatness. How about guaranteed chocolate for all? A world-beating American chocolate industry? Promoting a new advanced chocolate civilization?

America's political leaders are being laughed at around the world. But for all the wrong reasons. Their worst political crime is failing to deal with the looming chocolate crisis. If they fail to act, future generations will never forgive them.