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Importing sustainable cocoa: Switzerland making good progress

Switzerland is one of the world-leading country for organic and fair trade chocolate

Swiss chocolate manufacturers are teaming up with other industry players to work toward the long-term goal of exclusively importing sustainably grown cocoa into Switzerland, adopting 80% as an interim target to be achieved by 2025. Switzerland is already the world leader for per-capita consumption of organic and fair trade products.

“The per capita consumption of organic and Fairtrade products in Switzerland is the highest per capita globally and sales of Fairtrade chocolate have increased sharply in recent years.” The above quote is from a study on imported commodities (soy, palm oil, cocoa, wood, coffee, sugar cane and coconut) conducted by a British consultancy on behalf of the WWF. A different picture was conveyed however by an abridged version of the study published this week that distorts the situation.

Recommendations regarding multi-stakeholder initiatives

The abstract of the aforementioned study, which respecting specific points was selectively shortened or alternatively expanded, focuses on deforestation. The alterations made noticeably emphasise negative factors in connection with a predictable call for legislative action in Switzerland, requiring Swiss companies to document that “products they sell in Switzerland do not drive global deforestation or violate human rights.” The WWF’s recommendation of “joining multi-stakeholder initiatives (...) like the Swiss Platform for Sustainable Cocoa” comes as an unexpectedly positive impetus. This platform was initiated by CHOCOSUISSE and Swiss chocolate manufacturers in partnership with the federal government, ~~traders~~retailers, research organisations and civil society representatives. Accordingly, the recommendation to join this multi-stakeholder initiative should be addressed to other stakeholders in addition to companies, including the WWF itself. For unfortunately, the WWF, in contrast to other important Swiss NGOs, has not yet joined this platform.

Swiss activism in fighting deforestation

Numerous Swiss companies, CHOCOCUISSE and the Swiss Platform for Sustainable Cocoa are committed to finding constructive solutions to the problem of deforestation, such as by promoting agroforestry systems. The Swiss Platform coordinates its activities with non-Swiss organizations, as optimising agricultural practices is a key lever for reducing land usage for cocoa growing. Swiss companies are undertaking major efforts in this area, among others.

Coordinated international solutions needed

It is dubious why the short version of the study cites the Swiss population as a percentage of the global population (0.1%) in relation to its share of imported cocoa as a percentage of the total global cocoa harvest (3%), as this ignores the fact that over 70% of the chocolate produced in Switzerland is exported. Nor is the key point mentioned in the study that the EU is the world’s largest cocoa importer, accounting for over 60% of the worldwide total. Considering the volume this implies, it is apparent that effective approaches to achieving more sustainable cocoa production must be cross-border in nature, and well-coordinated with the EU in particular.

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