

Press release

April 17th 2024

As second largest exporter of chocolate in the world, the Belgian chocolate industry will be represented by Choprabisco at the World Cocoa Conference in Brussels

Choprabisco, the Royal Belgian Association of the Chocolate, Praline, Biscuit and Confectionery Industry, is attending the World Cocoa Conference to reinforce the global reputation of Belgian chocolate, known for its excellent quality, craftsmanship, as well as its ethical values and sustainability.

Cocoa and chocolate are in the spotlight just as ICCO (International Cocoa Organisation), in collaboration with the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, is holding the World Cocoa Conference in Brussels, from 21 to 24 April 2024.

Belgium has real gems in the chocolate sector. Innovations and creativity abound and are recognised worldwide. And we have remarkable know-how in research, production, and export of chocolate. This expertise is inextricably linked to the people who master the craft. It is therefore essential to encourage the talent of young people, further highlight our innovations and set ourselves as an example in sustainable chocolate.

Pillar of the Belgian food industry and second largest exporter of chocolate in the world

The sector, with 170 members, is a major player in our economy, with a production turnover of €7.7 billion, about 10% of the total Belgian food industry. It employs 14,200 workers with 600 employers. Moreover, the sector makes a significant contribution to our Belgian exports, with €5.2 billion or 14.5% of the total food industry.

Chocolate alone has a production turnover of €6.1 billion, of which 56% or €3.4 billion is exported. Belgium is the world's second largest exporter of chocolate after Germany, exporting 668,000 tonnes of chocolate.

World Cocoa Conference in Brussels

The World Cocoa Conference is the largest event in the cocoa sector, bringing together more than 1,000 actors from around the world to exchange views on making the sector more sustainable. An appointment Choprabisco does not want to miss to support the reputation of sustainable Belgian chocolate and the know-how of our chocolatiers.

This year's theme is paying more for sustainable cocoa. Indeed, the chocolate supply chain faces numerous challenges worldwide.

Over 300,000 tonnes of cocoa beans are imported into Belgium every year, more than 70% of which come from Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. In these countries, small-scale cocoa farmers typically live in a context of poverty, creating risks of child labour and/or deforestation. Today, an average cocoa farmer in West Africa does not even earn half the living income a family needs to support themselves and invest in their cocoa farm.

This is why the 2018 Berlin Declaration of the World Cocoa Conference made living income a priority. Since then, the Belgian chocolate sector has taken additional measures to better support cocoa producers in countries of origin.

Challenges of the Belgian chocolate sector

- **Sustainable Belgian chocolate: Beyond Chocolate**

In 2018, then Minister of Development Cooperation, Alexander De Croo encouraged the Belgian chocolate sector to put sustainability at the heart of its focus next to top quality. The Belgian partnership, Beyond, Chocolate, was the first initiative in Europe to include a living income for cocoa farmers as an ambition in its charter.

In Beyond Chocolate, Belgian chocolate companies and chocolatiers, together with all other stakeholders involved - supermarkets, NGOs, certification organisations and universities - commit to making all chocolate produced and sold in Belgium sustainable.

Beyond Chocolate aims for all chocolate produced and/or sold in Belgium to be certified or comply with a sustainable company programme by 2025. By 2030, cocoa producers linked to the Belgian market will earn a living income.

According to Beyond Chocolate's latest annual report 2022, good progress has already been made: 90% of all chocolate sold in Belgium and 68% of all chocolate produced in Belgium is certified and/or complies with a corporate sustainability programme and 47% of all chocolate is traceable back to the cocoa farm.

Although living income was not yet on the radar of many companies' in 2018, this challenge is now increasingly central to their sustainability strategies. For example, 15% of cocoa farmers in the value chain of Beyond Chocolate partners are supported by a living income strategy. More than 70 players in the chocolate sector have already committed to achieving a living income for cocoa farmers. There is still a long way to go in the coming years. Beyond Chocolate aims to increase demand for sustainable chocolate and guide companies in their sustainability strategy and procurement policies. To boost business, a €1.5 million fund is available for pilot projects around living income.

Choprabisco's president Philippe de Selliers summarizes it as follows: *"If we want to offer our customers happiness through our chocolate, we cannot afford to let cocoa farmers live in poverty. This is why Choprabisco encourages its members to pursue commitments to sustainability, this only strengthens the prestige of Belgian chocolate, which is so valued around the world. "*

- **Attracting and retaining talent**

With 14,200 employees, the Belgian chocolate, praline, biscuit, and confectionery sector is one of the most important subsectors of the Belgian food industry, employing 100,000 people. But we see around 800 vacancies a year at companies in the sector, who are increasingly looking for talent and skills.

Young people should be encouraged to see the many opportunities in the country's tastiest sector, both artisanal and highly technical. Collaborations with schools, dual learning and open days, company visits and internships are the perfect springboard to our companies.

"The future of the sector lies in the hands of motivated young people who want to build their future with chocolatiers or our chocolate, biscuit and confectionery companies. We need to attract, train, and motivate them to make a difference on a global level," says Choprabisco's president.

- **Innovation, success in the 21st century**

Belgium holds a wonderful heritage thanks to the work and commitment of many professionals who were able to make a difference in the past. The chocolate ecosystem of the 20th century created top chefs and chocolatiers, strong international brands, inventions, internationally renowned competitions, and unique collaborations with professional schools.

Choprabisco plays a role in promoting the dynamism, innovative power, and sustainability ambitions of the sector in the 21st century. This support is essential to maintain the excellence of Belgian chocolate at the top of the world. Because we also see a lot of vibrant creativity and innovation capacity coming in other countries. This is why Choprabisco wants to focus more on communication to put the reputation of Belgian chocolate in the spotlight by highlighting the national or international awards of Belgian chocolatiers. You can find out more about this on the new website. *"Faced with these three major challenges of sustainability, innovation and talent, Choprabisco stands by its members to support them and strengthen the excellence of Belgian chocolate. Its presence at WCC2024 testifies to this proactive strategy"* the federation president concluded.

Additional information

Link with photos and documents : <http://www.forum-communication.be/fileBox/Choprabisco/>

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