

Cadbury and the palm oil backlash in New Zealand

From the sweeties.net wiki

In the middle of 2009, Cadbury quietly changed the recipe of some of its chocolate sold outside the UK. It replaced some of the cocoa butter with palm oil. In New Zealand and Australia, people noticed.

What changed

Cocoa butter is the natural fat from the cocoa bean, and it gives chocolate its melt and its snap. Palm oil is much cheaper. Cadbury said the change was a response to consumer demand, to improve the taste and texture of its chocolate. But there was no new improved recipe claim on the labels in New Zealand, so many shoppers did not know anything had changed until they tasted it, or read about it.

The backlash

The reaction was fierce on two fronts. Chocolate lovers objected to the taste of what they saw as a cheaper recipe. Environmentalists objected to the palm oil itself, because growing it has been one of the biggest causes of rainforest destruction, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia. The two groups made a powerful combination.

The climbdown

By August 2009, Cadbury announced that it was going back to using cocoa butter. The whole episode, from quiet change to public reversal, took only a few months.

A sign of the times

The row came just before the much bigger 2010 Greenpeace campaign against Nestlé's KitKat, which also centred on palm oil and orangutan habitat: see [KitKat, Greenpeace and the palm oil campaign](#). Together they showed that customers cared not just about how chocolate tasted, but about where its ingredients came from.

It was also a difficult year for Cadbury in other ways. A few weeks after the palm oil reversal, in September 2009, the American food giant Kraft launched its hostile bid for the company: see [how Cadbury was sold to Kraft](#).

Palm oil today

Palm oil is still widely used in sweets and chocolate products, often in fillings, coatings and biscuit layers rather than in the chocolate itself. Many companies now buy palm oil certified as sustainable, although certification schemes have faced their own criticism. For how to spot it on a label, see [palm oil in sweets](#).

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