

The bitter future of chocolate? How drought and a youth exodus threaten Mexico's prized cocoa

Level 1: Elementary

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

- Do you like chocolate? What kind of chocolate do you enjoy?
- Would you like to work as a farmer? Why or why not?

2 Key words

a. Match the words with their definitions. Then find and highlight them in the article to read them in context.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. crop | a. an illness that makes a person, animal or plant sick |
| 2. survive | b. to continue to live in a difficult situation |
| 3. harvest | c. the ways that people do things over time that they share with their children or grandchildren |
| 4. climate change | d. an answer to a problem or a way to make something better |
| 5. traditions | e. to collect plants from the fields |
| 6. hectares | f. a plant such as rice or cocoa grown by farmers for food |
| 7. solution | g. when the Earth gets warmer over a long time |
| 8. disease | h. a piece of land (about the size of a sports field) |

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b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity.

1. Plants can get a(n) _____ that stops them from growing.
2. My family has different _____ such as eating cake on birthdays.
3. Scientists are looking for a(n) _____ to save water.
4. _____ makes the summer very hot.
5. Coffee grows on many _____ of land in Brazil.
6. Some farmers grow rice as a(n) _____.
7. We usually _____ tomatoes from the garden in August.
8. Fish can't _____ out of water for a long time.

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Mattha Busby
3 September, 2024

- 1 Edilberto Morales grows cocoa in Mexico. Last year, he only harvested half of his usual amount because there wasn't much rain. "Climate change has affected us a lot," he says.
- 2 Cocoa is an important crop in Mexico. The Maya, Toltec and Aztec peoples grew cocoa thousands of years ago. When the Spanish arrived, they brought cocoa to Europe. Later, people added sugar to cocoa to make chocolate.
- 3 Today, cocoa farming is very difficult. Climate change is causing big problems for farmers. The weather is getting hotter, and rivers are drying up. Some farmers hope that new types of cocoa plants can survive better, but no good solution has been found yet.
- 4 Cocoa prices are also going up. In August 2023, 1,000 kilograms of cocoa cost 3,400 US dollars. By July 2024, the price was nearly 8,400 US dollars. Eder Herrera, another cocoa farmer, says this year has been very hot, and the cocoa plants are not growing well.
- 5 Farming has been hard for many years. In the 1970s, Herrera looked after 600 hectares of land. Now, he only has 200 hectares. In 2007, a disease damaged 90 per cent of cocoa crops in the area. Many farmers gave up growing cocoa and started growing other crops like coffee or mangoes.
- 6 Another big problem is that young people don't want to work on farms. They prefer to move to cities and find different jobs. Julio Salazar owns a chocolate business, and he tries to help by teaching young people about cocoa farming. His company shows young people how to grow cocoa and passes on local traditions.
- 7 Morales is not positive. "Young people aren't interested in farms because they want to grow up in cities," he says. They don't like farm work." This means the future of chocolate is not good. Climate change, high prices and only a few young farmers are making it very difficult to grow cocoa in Mexico.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these sentences True (T) or False (F)? Correct any that are false.

1. Edilberto Morales harvested more crops last year than in other years.
2. The Maya, Toltec and Aztec people grew cocoa thousands of years ago.
3. Climate change is helping cocoa farmers grow more crops.
4. Cocoa prices went up between August 2023 and July 2024.
5. In the 1970s, Eder Herrera had 600 hectares of land and he has the same amount today.
6. Young people are interested in working on farms and learning about cocoa farming.

4 Key language

a. Find the verbs in the text and match them with a preposition from the wordpool.

after

on

up

up

up

up

1. give _____
2. dry _____
3. pass _____
4. look _____
5. go _____
6. grow _____

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b. Read the definitions and then complete the examples with a phrasal verb in the correct form.

1. to increase in price or amount

The cost of cocoa _____ every year.

2. to share something from one generation to the next

The farmer _____ the farm to his grandchildren.

3. to get older and become an adult

You're not from London? Where did you _____?

4. to stop doing something

David _____ smoking ten years ago.

5. (for a river) to have no water in it

Because it was a very hot summer, the river _____.

6. to help and care for someone

You must _____ your new puppy and give it food and water every day.

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Do you prefer to live in the country or the city? Why?
- Do you think people will have less food in the future? Why or why not?
- What crops are important in your country?

6 In your own words

a. Write a short story or script imagining a future where chocolate has become rare and valuable. Include key words, key language and phrasal verbs from the previous activities.

b. Share your stories or scripts with your class.