

The kids are alright: How Germany's best-selling Fairtrade chocolate was created by children

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When a group of children asked global chocolate firms to help finance their plant-a-tree campaign, not a single company stepped forward. This spurred the children on to create their own brand, The Change Chocolate, which is now Germany's biggest-selling Fairtrade chocolate brand.



The story of The Change Chocolate (Die Gute Schokolade) started in 2007 when nine-year-old Felix Finkbeiner from Germany gave a presentation to his schoolmates about climate change.

Inspired by his hero, Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan environmental activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate who launched the Billion Tree Campaign, Finkbeiner challenged his classmates: if children planted one million trees in each country of the world, this could offset global CO2 emissions.

Finkbeiner founded Plant for the Planet and three years later, the children involved in the initiative planted their millionth tree.

The jump to chocolate

Several years after giving this first school presentation, Finkbeiner, already a seasoned public speaker having addressed the European Parliament and United Nations' General Assembly at ages 10 and 13, gave a talk at a conference organised by Swiss machinery manufacturer Buehler.

The conference was attended by the chocolate industry's



Finkbeiner addressing delegates at the BCFN conference in Milan this week.

top brass as Buehler manufactures the equipment used to produce around 40% of the world's chocolate.

"I gave a speech at their conference. Most of the CEOs of global chocolate companies were present and, after introducing what we do, I suggested that each company should give us one euro for every tonne of chocolate they produce so we can plant a tree with that.

"Not a single company wanted to participate," he told FoodNavigator at the Barilla Centre for Food and Nutrition Forum this week in Milan.

Finkbeiner left the stage at the Buehler conference, denouncing as *"shocking"* the companies' silence when asked to donate the equivalent of 0.01% of their turnover to Plant for the Planet. As he left the stage, those in attendance laughed.

"That's how the idea emerged that we could create our own chocolate," he said.

Plant for the Planet eventually found a company that was willing to help – Swiss B2B supplier Chocolats Halba, which manufactures The Co-op's private label range – and, together, they launched the Change Chocolate in 2012.

The Change Chocolate is now the biggest-selling Fairtrade chocolate brand in Germany. It has sold around 12 million bars so far, directly contributing to the planting of three million trees.

Its popularity is probably thanks, in part, to its price: each 100 g bar retails for just one euro. Of this one euro, thirty cents goes directly to Plant for the Planet to plant trees and finance its educational programmes. The company is also conscious of ensuring this money is used to fund its core mission, and it commits to planting one tree for every five bars sold.

Finkbeiner said the one-euro price tag is enough to cover costs for two reasons.

"The retailers aren't really profiting from it, they are essentially doing it pro bono. We sell the chocolate to the retailers for 90 cents, which is obviously far less than they would normally have and we have similar deals with the companies transporting our chocolate and the producers. Essentially, all of them forfeit their profit for our benefit. We also only have that one product which simplifies our operations significantly and adds to our profit margins."

A basic standard

The Change Chocolate is both Fairtrade-certified, organic and carbon neutral, and Finkbeiner, who is now 21, said this should be the basic standard for all products.

"This is basically how we envisage that every product should work, and we would love it if people did the same with other products or with chocolate in other countries. Developing products for the [purpose] of planting trees would be fantastic."

The Change Chocolate bar is currently sold Germany and Austria. Although it would love to expand to other countries, other projects have priority, Finkbeiner explained. The brand is open to collaborating with other industry stakeholders interested in launching it in new markets, he added.

It is now Plant for the Planet that leads the Billion Tree Campaign, with its 150 employees (of whom 100 are actively involved in planting trees every day) and thousands of child ambassadors.

"Many of our members have spoken in national parliaments or had sit-downs with their presidents, always trying to convince them to tackle the climate crisis and especially to plant trees. We empower our ambassadors all over the world [...] and, so far, we have done just that with 70,000 children from 67 countries."

The companies involved in manufacturing, distributing and selling the Change Chocolate include Chocolats Halba, Buehler and the retailers DW, Rewe, Kaufland, Edeka and Alnatura.

To see Finkbeiner addressing Buehler conference delegates, watch here:

The Change Chocolate's Success Story



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