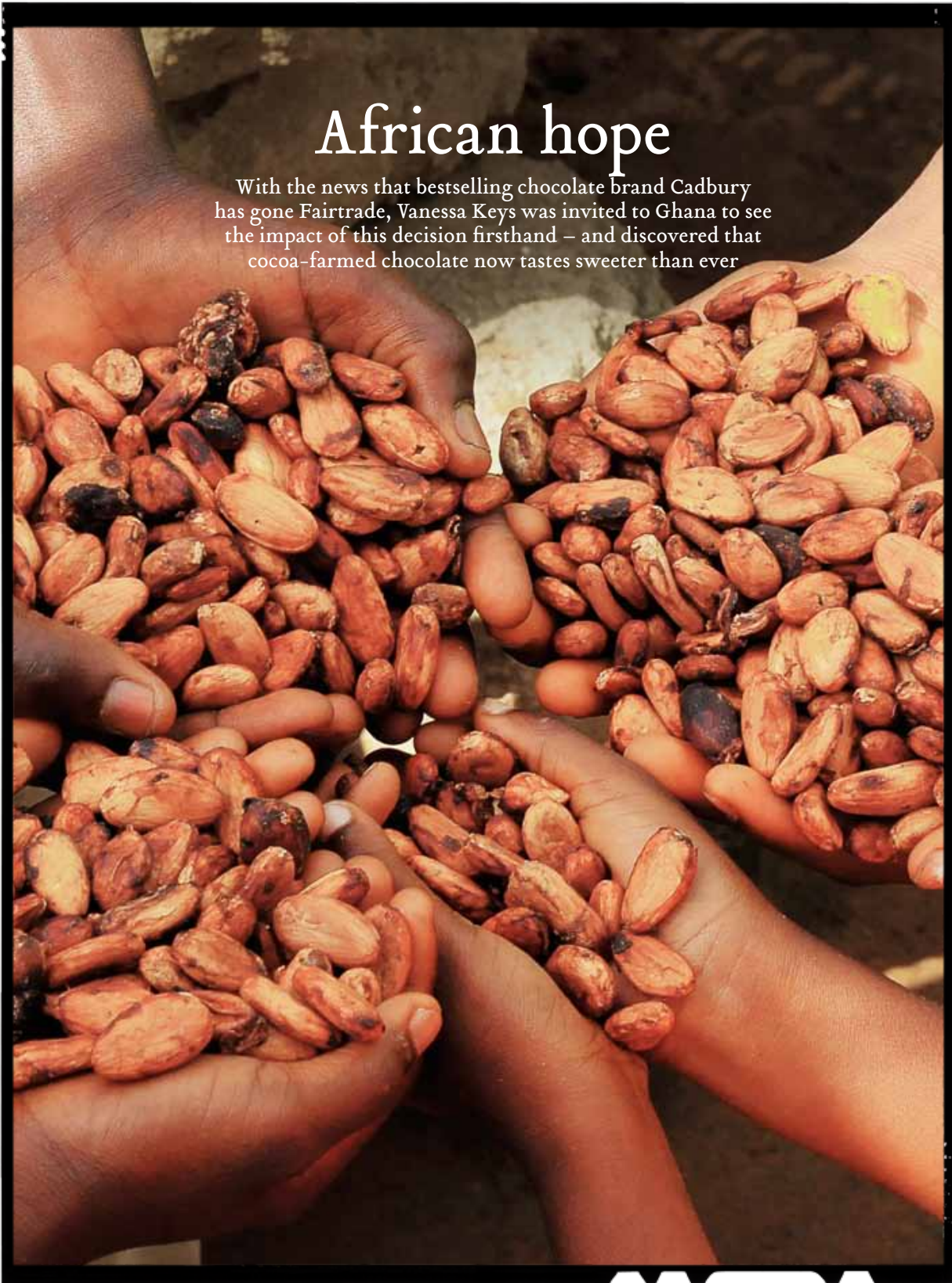


# African hope

With the news that bestselling chocolate brand Cadbury has gone Fairtrade, Vanessa Keys was invited to Ghana to see the impact of this decision firsthand – and discovered that cocoa-farmed chocolate now tastes sweeter than ever



An unwavering sense of pride envelops Mensahkrom, a 300-acre cocoa village nestled in lush vegetation, 400 kilometres from Accra, the capital of Ghana. Village elders swell with happiness at the sight of visitors and wide-eyed children chatter cacophonously over their schoolbooks, while harmonic voices ring out over the sweeping plains and mingle with the heady scent of spices: "Welcome, welcome!"

It is here, on this Fairtrade-certified cocoa farm, that thousands of hand-planted cocoa trees are grown and nurtured, sacks of cacao pods picked and cracked open, and the bitter cocoa nibs that give chocolate its creamy taste carefully extracted, dried and crushed.

"Cocoa is Ghana and Ghana is cocoa," chorus the Mensahkrom farmers, scooping up handfuls of dark, nutty cacao beans. With a functioning well that spurts fresh drinking water, a well-equipped primary school and new bicycles that shorten the long journey to the nearest high school, Mensahkrom is a credit to the success of its newly won Fairtrade status. The villagers are quick to point out that it's not aid they're receiving but rather, a fair chance to trade on the world market. "We get a fixed price for our crops and the agricultural training that helps us maintain a sustainable business," explains Frederick, a well-spoken elder who has been farming for 35 years.

With a sleeping infant tucked to her chest, Sarah, Frederick's wife, speaks in a soft, lilting voice about the impact fair trade has made on their family. "The extra money we receive means our children can continue to attend school," she says. "Education gives them a future; they can study abroad and become accountants, lawyers and doctors."

Fairtrade certification is not handed out willy-nilly; the farmers at Mensahkrom have to prove that their farm can operate as a collective organisation, and that they have strong democratic structures in place that enable individual farmers to have a say. The farmers also sign up to a set of environmental standards that encourage more sustainable production, prohibit the use of harmful chemicals and forbid child labour. "The Fairtrade label is essentially a third-party certification of the supply chain," explains Steve Knapp, the executive director of Fairtrade Labelling in Australia and New Zealand. "When it comes to commodities produced in developing countries, only a small percentage of the retail price goes to the farmers at the bottom of the supply chain. As consumers, we naturally want cheaper goods but those cost reductions are often pushed down the supply chain to the most vulnerable people, who can end up getting paid less than it would actually cost them to grow the product in the first place. Too often, they get caught in a spiral of debt and poverty, and can end up losing their land and livelihood."

In Australia, Fairtrade-certified goods have been around since 2005 but have remained a niche product category – until now. Cadbury's Dairy Milk chocolate has achieved Fairtrade certification and to ensure that Australian consumers can support Fairtrade, Cadbury has agreed to purchase 3900 tonnes of the Ghanaian beans, the annual amount needed to meet Dairy Milk chocolate demand in Australia and New Zealand. For the farmers at Mensahkrom, the most important thing about gaining certification is a stable income. "If the market goes down, the buyer is committed to purchasing the beans at the Fairtrade minimum price," explains Steve. Cocoa has generally been trading at an all-time high and neither Steve nor Alison Ward, the head of global corporate responsibility for Cadbury, can see it falling drastically any time soon. "A set price that complies with the world market ensures that farmers don't sell their product for a price lower than it costs them to produce," says Alison. An additional premium – currently set at US\$150 (\$180)/tonne – is given to the farmers to invest in building communities – and the farmers choose what these projects will be. >



#### how does chocolate go from bean to block?

Cacao trees thrive in humid areas and each produces around 20-30 pods a year. Once ripe, the pods are cracked open, and the fleshy white pulp is scooped out, covered with banana leaves and left to ferment on the ground for five to six days until the pulp becomes liquid and nutty brown beans emerge. They're placed on bamboo mats to dry and soak up the sun's rays for around seven to 10 days, at which stage they're bundled into sacks and transported to the manufacturer for processing. The cacao beans are roasted and ground down to create a liquid mass called cocoa liquor and, depending on what type of chocolate is being made, cocoa butter, sugar and milk are added.

The sweet mixture is then rolled into a thin paste and run through a conching machine to extract further flavour, before being moulded into the blocks and bars we see in the supermarket.

A cocoa farm in Mensahkrom {bottom left}, where farmers inspect cacao beans {bottom right & opposite} for harvest.








< Fairtrade makes an initial inspection when the cocoa farm is first certified and, thereafter, annually. "One requirement is that the group has a general assembly that everyone from the cooperative has the chance to attend," says Steve. They're required to show records of meetings and how decisions have been made. "Whether they spend the premiums on health, teachers, bicycles or wells, the most important thing is that the farmers are getting organised and working collectively, gaining a stronger voice, having greater control in the supply chain and building trade relationships," says Alison. "It's a bit of a hackneyed phrase but if you give a man or woman a fish, you feed them for a day – teach them to fish and they can eat for life."

What emerges from talking to the farmers at Mensahkrom is their desire to certify more of their cocoa as Fairtrade. "The amount of Fairtrade-certified cocoa available currently exceeds demand – but that's steadily improving," says Steve. Two years ago, only five per cent of cocoa grown in Ghana was purchased as Fairtrade – now that figure is 25 per cent. "The challenge is growing the business for existing cocoa producers so that they can continue to benefit, while also bringing new producers into the system so more people in developing countries can enjoy the benefits of fair trade," says Steve. "If the farmers know they will always be paid a minimum amount for their product, they are able to plan for the future, and invest in their communities, production and improving the product; this all equates to an improvement in their quality of life."

Thousands of miles away from the furiously hot sun and friendly villagers, the connection between your block of chocolate and the livelihood of Ghanaian farmers may not be immediately apparent – but as consumers, we have a responsibility to those at the beginning of the supply chain. Next time your sweet tooth hits, remember that buying fair trade can help to sustain communities and help them prosper. Now that's a feel-good fix that can't be measured. 

ON A GLOBAL SCALE, ONE QUARTER OF CADBURY DAIRY MILK GLOBAL SALES AND 350 MILLION BARS WILL BE FAIRTRADE CERTIFIED THIS YEAR. THIS PLEDGE EQUATES TO 20,000 TONNES OF FAIRTRADE COCOA SALES FROM GHANA ANNUALLY

#### child labour in Ghana

The cocoa industry has long been tainted by a bitter history of child labour. Although it's commonplace for African children to help out on the family farm, it's vital that any unacceptable child labour that places the child at risk of physical harm or limits a child's ability to attend school is stopped. "Our work in eradicating child labour starts with the community," says Alison Ward, the head of global corporate responsibility for Cadbury. "Specifically, with educating their parents about the danger of child labour and the pitfalls of missing schooling. We work with these communities to agree upon the role of children and which jobs they should and shouldn't do." The Ghanaian government has established a national task force devoted to child labour issues, including steps to improve education and protect human rights, and efforts are underway by the International Cocoa Initiative ([cocoainitiative.org](http://cocoainitiative.org)), which aims to help at-risk children in Ghana and support communities to ensure cocoa is grown responsibly. To show your support, join World Vision's 'Don't Trade Lives' campaign; visit [worldvision.com.au/ourwork/solutions/dontradelives.aspx](http://worldvision.com.au/ourwork/solutions/dontradelives.aspx).



The independence and confidence of cocoa farmers, supported by Fairtrade, has seen cocoa production thrive. The families of Mensahkrom {pictured} are testament to the value of supporting local communities and fairer farming practices.

*Vanessa Keys travelled to Ghana courtesy of Cadbury Australia.*

PHOTOGRAPHY (TOP) VANESSA KEYS