

# Swell AI Transcript: EIT Food\_ Craft Chocolate V2.mp3

Matt Eastland:

Hi everyone, I'm Matt Eastland and welcome to the Food Fight podcast from EIT Food, exploring the greatest challenges facing the food system and the innovations and entrepreneurs looking to solve them. If there's one thing I know, it's that we're all pretty obsessed with chocolate. The European chocolate market alone has been valued at 42 billion euros in 2022, and that's expected to grow 5% year on year for the next five years. But as we turn more attention to the environment, and specifically the carbon footprint of the food we eat, there have been questions raised about the sustainability and ethics of chocolate production. So, can we continue to consume chocolate at such high rates? And how can we source sustainable bars that are also produced ethically? Educating us today about the realities of the chocolate landscape is world-renowned supertaster and co-founder of Cocoa Runners, Spencer Hyman. Cocoa Runners is an online store selling the world's best craft chocolate. They offer monthly subscriptions to their Cocoa Runners club, who also receive a selection of different chocolates to taste every month directly from the growers. And with a background in media and technology, Spencer has embarked on an unexpected journey into the world of fine chocolate to explore flavour whilst also helping change the world for the better. Spencer, thank you for coming on the show.

Spencer Hyman:

It's a great honour. And as I was saying, I'm an avid listener and an avid supporter of this great intersection between tech and food and flavour and entrepreneurship. It's fantastic.

Matt Eastland:

Spencer, flattery will get you absolutely everywhere. So, yeah, welcome. Especially with a bit of chocolate. Well, let's talk about it. So let's just jump right in then. So, Kraft chocolate. What is it exactly? How would you describe it for our listeners?

Spencer Hyman:

Let's step back because you've already done a very good job of setting the scene. One in four, one in five Brits eat chocolate every day. 75% of us eat every three or four days. But we eat what broadly we would sort of call commodity or ultra-processed or mass-produced chocolate. Right. Which means that it's more about scoffing than about savouring. Guilty. And it's underpinned. Well, I think you're a savourer too. I think it's underpinned. Anyone who's got your taste in wine has got to be into savouring too. It's underpinned, though, the chocolate world with sort of this sort of disastrous. On the one hand, trying to get you into the bliss point, which we'll talk a bit more about later to get you to scoff. And on the other hand, to avoid really thinking about the amazing flavors and environmental benefits that you can get from chocolate. So what Kraft chocolate tries to do is basically figure out how you can find

the world's best cocoa beans, figure out how you can craft those into amazing chocolate bars, and then take you on a journey of delight with flavor. So it's like, in this sense, many, many other industries. So you know, like you've got, you know, amazing cheeses, or you've got specialty coffee, or you've got craft beer. It's unlike them, however, in that it hasn't grown anything like the rate of, for example, specialty coffee or craft beer. But what craft chocolate is all about, it's all around trying to use flavour to help farmers and to get you to eat more healthily and to fix the planet.

Matt Eastland:

Wow. And we can do all of that through chocolate. That is incredible. And I believe you've also brought some Kraft chocolate in, which I am absolutely delighted about. A, I love chocolate. But B, like I was saying to you offline, I'm just big into taste, flavour, profiling, all of that. So I'd love to try some.

Spencer Hyman:

Can we do this? We definitely can. And we'll use it to actually define Kraft chocolate. So Kraft chocolate is basically chocolate when you know where the beans come from, down to the level of the farm or the co-op. and when you know how it's been crafted, and when you go on a flavour journey. But before we do that, we're basically going to have a bar of chocolate here from a lovely company called Menakao, who are one of the few chocolate makers to actually be not just growing cacao in Madagascar, but also crafting it there. But I'm going to use it to teach you how to eat chocolate properly, which sounds like a very, very sort of strange thing to do. But you're a wino, so you've got it, and you know how to sip wine and sort of you know swirl it around everything else. There is a ritual to eating chocolate which is very important and it's sort of the basis I think to appreciating the difference between taste and flavor. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to give you three bits of chocolate here. I'm going to take some but before you sort of get into it too much you're doing the right thing you've absolutely got it. First thing you do with a piece of chocolate give it a quick sniff Give it a quick sniff. This is gonna be a bit difficult for us to do because we've got headphones on. But what I actually want you to do is to lift it up. We'll actually lift it up to the microphone. Okay. And snap it. Okay.

Matt Eastland:

That's where all my strength fails me.

Spencer Hyman:

You've got that very nice snap, but that snap is incredibly important because it means it's been properly tempered and it's going to do something which chocolate is unique in being able to do, which is it's a solid at room temperature, but it melts and releases

all those volatiles and aromas and flavors when you put it in your mouth or when you keep it in your hands for too long. But to try and explain to you the difference between taste and flavour, we're going to play a slightly strange game, which you've probably played quite a few times before. But what I want you to do is take a very small piece of the chocolate, and then before you put it in your mouth, I want you to tightly squeeze your nose shut, and then drop it on your tongue, and suck it. And I want you to describe to me what sensations you get. And I hope I've given you a bit, which is going to have maybe a little bit of salt on it.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, I can taste the salt. But because you're cutting off that ability to smell, that retro nasal olfaction, it doesn't give you a lot.

Spencer Hyman:

It doesn't give you a lot. It gives you a little bit of texture, though, because it's got some nibs in it. But now we're talking. The other great thing about this is you can do this with chocolate, because you can basically breathe in and out through your mouth when you've got a piece of chocolate in it. With a glass of wine, it's a bit more difficult, because it tends to sort of go everywhere if you basically start talking with a glass full of wine. OK, now that I've kept you going, count to three, then release your nose. and just describe to me all the flavours that you get. Oh wow, what a difference. That is the difference between taste and flavour. So taste is all about biochemical receptors that you've got on your tongue, in your mouth, all the way down to your gut. That's what we're talking about with the second stomach, which detects things like sourness, sweetness, saltiness, bitterness, umami. But flavour is what chocolate has in super abundance. And it's that melting which releases all those amazing volatiles. And that's what Kraft chocolate is all about. So even, you know, the big chocolate company guys, when they're tasting chocolate, they'll play the same trick. And that's basically because they're trying to judge the sweetness. So keep going. And just savour it.

Matt Eastland:

I mean, so the saltiness comes through a lot, a lot quicker. Yep, salt tastes through. Then there's a little bit of fruitiness there. There's a little bit of kind of coffee in the background. You know, it's quite smoky.

Spencer Hyman:

Yep. It's got a bit of smoke. It's got a bit of tanginess. Maybe a bit of caramel. Yes. Yes. Yep. And then maybe towards the end. So one of the great things about flavour is that it's, you know, we can all describe colors, we can look at the rainbow, and we can all describe them. But with flavors, it often sort of on the tip of our

tongue. So it actually really helps when you've done the WSET, and you've got this great sort of wine skills. But actually, once you have the vocab, it really helps you appreciate and understand. And you'll start to savor it. And the amazing thing about chocolate is and I have this argument lots of times with friends in other industries, I don't think anything has got the same complexity of flavour as chocolate. It's very layered, isn't it? And it's a wave. So we always use this chart, which we developed with James Hoffman and Barry Smith and Rebecca Palmer, so wine, coffee and philosophy and all that sort of stuff, which basically is all about sort of, if you think about it, when you go into the sea and you're about to sort of start surfing, You get a good idea of the texture of the waves, or what we sort of call, is it grainy? Is it gritty? Is it velvety? Is it smooth? Then the tastes start to hit you. Then you can get engulfed in this massive great wave. And then there's a sort of journey as you surf it when you get all the different flavor notes.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, and also, this is similar to wine, well, good wine as well, when it's particularly complex, there's quite a length to it, so it stays with you.

Spencer Hyman:

Basically, all good foods, and this is, I think, the secret to resisting ultra-processed foods, is what you and wine would call Blick, balance, length, intensity, complexity. And we'd sort of add some depth and other things to it, but it's this flavour journey that you get. That's completely different to ultra processed foods, where they're all about basically the bliss point and sensory specific satiety. So they're all about this, this amazing guy doesn't get enough opprobrium for it called Howard Moskowitz, who in the 1960s, worked out what we'd sort of called the Dorito effect, or the Pringles. Pringle effect, which is, you know, what do you want to have after you've had a Pringle? Once you pop, you can't stop. You got it. And that's basically because we are pre-programmed from birth, literally from mother's milk to like, and in fact, scoff and gobble and just adore sugar, salt, fat, and a bit of umami. And that's what he worked out. You can apply it to any food. And ironically, I think, actually, that chocolate got there 100 years earlier, because that's really what Daniel Peters' great discovery of milk chocolate is all about. It is an incredibly Moorish food. But what ultra-processed food's done is it's commoditized everything down to the level of just commodity ingredients, and then added flavorings. But above all, it's used the bliss point, sugar, salt, fat, and a bit of your money, just to get you to scoff it. And that's what I'm afraid most mass-produced confectionery and a lot of mass-produced chocolate is all about. It's not about giving you this flavor.

Matt Eastland:

So they have worked out almost mathematically, if I put these number of different things in, you will get to that bliss point which we're all going to love and we're just going to want to keep scoffing at. you combine certain ingredients, let's be honest, some of them not that great, but as long as you combine them in the right way, you can produce the bliss point.

Spencer Hyman:

The only other thing you do need to play around with is diversity. So the other great discovery is sensory specific satiety, which is a fancy way of saying, you know when you go to a nice ice cream place and they're trying to get you to have like three, maybe four, even five scoops, they're always going to get you to have different scoops and they'll often try and get different textures. So you want the texture and the difference. And actually, if you think about it, a lot of confectionery, They've got lots of different, you know, you bite into that well-known, any of those well-known brands, they've got lots of different texture. So they're playing with sugar, salt and fat and texture. And, you know, we are just like lambs to the slaughter. We're just going to scoff it. And then we get into all this nastiness about sort of, you know, well, if you've commoditized cacao, what's the problem with that? The problem is, is that you've destroyed the rainforest in the process.

Matt Eastland:

And you've started to talk about the challenges of commercial chocolate. I mean, yes, it's it's there's an environmental aspect to this as well. But I guess, of course, there's also a health aspect to it as well. Maybe you could kind of describe the challenges, shall we say to our listeners?

Spencer Hyman:

Yeah. So it's a huge challenge from an environmental perspective. So 70 percent of the world's cacao comes from two countries, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. And there are millions, you know, the numbers vary, you can see lots of different statistics, but the numbers are anywhere between three to five million cocoa farmers. And on the other hand, you've got less than a dozen big cocoa traders for want of a better expression and cocoa sources who are the buyers. So you've got this extraordinary position whereby there's lots of demand for cacao, the you know, the cocoa beans, And there's lots of farmers, but the number of buyers is very small. And so you've got this position where demand's sort of going up and up and up, but actually because there's a very few number of buyers and they've got the market sewn up, actually the price until very recently was very, very low. And it meant that the average cocoa farmer in West Africa needs anywhere between \$2.50, \$3 a day to live on. And yet they're being paid less than, if they're male, less than 80 cents a day. And if they're female, less than 30 cents a day. And so as a consequence, you have this disaster with a lot and lot and lot of child labour, slave labour, go back to Harkin Engel and all that

sort of stuff. And on top of that, you've got the real disaster for the planet. I mean, you know, the kid labour thing is absolutely awful. And we should talk a bit more about it in a minute. You've also got the environmental destruction. So if you go back to someone like the Côte d'Ivoire or Ghana, and you go back 30 years, 40 years, It was over 50% rainforest. In fact, 1990, if we just take a stake in the ground, that's actually gone down already to below 30%. Today, it's 2% or 3% rainforest left in those places. Now, cacao is an extraordinary fruit. So most people don't sort of think about it, but actually, you know, we all get upset now about avocados. You know, an average avocado takes about 400 litres of water to grow. you know, a handful of almonds, 700 litres to grow. Keep going.

Matt Eastland:

And for our listeners, by the way, we're just munching away.

Spencer Hyman:

I think what we're actually going to do, while I waffle on for a minute about that, I'm going to give you two different chocolates. These are basically from a fantastic guy called Frederick in Sweden called standout and I basically picked two bars one from Guatemala called Lachua which is grown by a tribe called the Ketchi who were the first people to bring chocolate to Europe back in 1544 and then we've got the famous Myer Mountain Billy so they're very close by one another they're slightly different beans they're definitely different fermentation but they've been crafted in the same way so if you open those two up And just try them. What I think, I hope what they'll do is they'll show you that even though the makers use exactly the same approach to making them, you really get incredibly different flavours from different fermentations and from different beans. Okay, going back onto cacao and water. So, you know, handful of almonds, 50 grams, 700 litres of water. Bar of chocolate, one and a half to 2,000 litres of water. It's a staggering amount. Now, it's fine if what you've got is, by the way, that crackling in the background is an environmentally friendly cellulose. I would expect nothing less. But you are evidencing here the disaster of this if you basically take it into a movie. Because you are very unpopular, because basically you cannot eat this stuff quietly. Because even though it's beautiful packaging, it's all designed to be environmentally friendly. Yeah, you've got the snow, you've got the nose, you've got the... okay. And then you're going to move on to the Maya mountain in a sec. So anyway, so back onto this. So if you grow cacao the way it should be grown, and actually the way to get all the diversity, you want to encourage craft chocolate, because it's all about the quality of the beans. And that means you need the rainforest. And that means you need the diversity. Actually, the great news is all that water gets recycled. Let's go back to West Africa, where we destroyed all the rainforest because the farmers are desperate to get more money. And the only way to get more money is by growing more cacao, because that's their only cash crop. So we've got to the situation now where we have no trees left. And that means that you've got this absolute nightmare of not just

deforestation, but also desertification.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, and monocropping as well.

Spencer Hyman:

Monocropping. But the real problem here is as well that if you go back, take like the Côte d'Ivoire and you go back 30, 40 years ago, it used to get, I'm going to get the exact numbers wrong, but I think it's like 75 to 85 inches of rain over 10 or 11 months of the year. Right. It now gets 60 to 65 inches of rain, but over the space of six weeks. Right. So you go from this sort of absolute drought, to being absolutely flooded. And on top of that, you're getting desertification. So from an environmental perspective, actually, there's a fantastic chart in COP26, when they basically sort of show you that there's one food you want to change, and we'll refer to it in the notes. It's basically, Kraft chocolate is better than almost anything else in terms of its environmental footprint, because it's encouraging people to preserve the rainforest. But mass produced commercial ultra processed chocolate is up there with farm prawns, and sort of, you know, other ultra processed meats. God, you're blowing my mind here, Spencer.

Matt Eastland:

planet by eating Kraft chocolate. Yeah, what a great line that is as well.

Spencer Hyman:

Yeah, I mean, I knew this was important, but I have to admit, I didn't, I didn't realize this one thing you want to do to basically, you know, one easy upgrade, one easy change, just to basically not just be healthier. We'll go into that in just a sec. Yeah. But also just to basically save the planet and not be basically you know, using child-slave labour on the lots, move to craft chocolate. And there's a second reason, by the way, why you should do this, which is that what most people forget is that the primary ingredient in most ultra-processed chocolate bars, most mass-produced chocolate bars, is not cacao.

Matt Eastland:

It's sugar. Sugar and then emulsifiers.

Spencer Hyman:

Yeah, and emulsifiers. Actually, the amount of emulsifiers is actually relatively low. It's only 2% or 4%. But what you use the emulsifiers and the lesser things to do is to actually reduce the amount of cocoa butter you need, or even CBEs, you know, cocoa butter equivalents, and all the sort of, you know, the palm oils and

everything else. Now, you've got those two. Wow. Completely different. So they're literally grown literally a couple of hundred miles apart. You've now got the Latua, which I find much fruitier. Oh my God.

Matt Eastland:

It's really citrusy. Yeah. It's got that bright berry citrus. It's almost like a proper wake up.

Spencer Hyman:

Yeah, it's a real, and it's interesting the way you've picked it. So you've definitely done it in the right way. The first one is a bit more chocolatey, a bit more caramelly, a bit richer, got some nice honeyed notes. They're both, in terms of, you know, the way they've been crafted, the way they've been ground, the way they've been conched, exactly the same, similar roast profile. He uses a very, very similar roast profile. So what you're getting here is different beans and different, above all, fermentations. So just as with wine and with bread and with other, and cheese, it's the fermentation which really drives flavour. The same is true of chocolate.

Matt Eastland:

Okay. And talk to me about then, okay, environmental, we need to make much better choices here. That's super clear. But in from a health perspective, then when we're, you know, let's be honest, most of us choosing the kind of the mass market commercialised chocolate. Why is that bad from a health perspective?

Spencer Hyman:

Okay, I'm going to again spin it and by basically saying that here are the good things about chocolate. So chocolate is actually incredibly good in lots of different ways. So it's got its primary stimulant is not caffeine, although there is some caffeine in it. It's theobromine, which is what you break down when you have caffeine. And theobromine is one of those extraordinary stimulants, which basically is a vasodilator, but it doesn't cause your blood pressure to rise. So it's really, it's an amazing stimulant. And it used to be recommended to asthmatics and people like that, but it is a very calming stimulant. I know that sounds like an oxymoron, but bear with me. It's also an incredibly high source of fiber. So one of these chocolate bars, so it's basically the average dark Kraft chocolate bar will have five to 10 grams of fiber in it. put it in context, you know, male, females, adults, et cetera. You need 25 to 40 grams of fiber a day. Hardly any of us get that. So a few squares of Kraft chocolate is definitely going to help you. So fiber. Then the next thing is all the things which basically give chocolate all of its flavor. So the anthocyanins, the polyphenols, the flavonoids, epicatechins, all that sort of stuff. Those are super abundant in chocolate, and they're also very, very powerful antioxidants. And then finally, there's a whole bunch of amazing minerals, which are



very difficult to get elsewhere, like sort of, you know, manganese and iron and all those other great things. So there's a whole bunch of wonderful things about chocolate. There's also a whole bunch of complete guff written about chocolate, which date back to an extraordinary guy called Benjamin Keane. So can we have a quick diversion?

Matt Eastland:  
Yeah, go for it.

Spencer Hyman:  
Let's talk about Benjamin. Benjamin is really one of the most fascinating guys of the 20th century, who is, on the one hand, he's the guy who arguably started the Iranian hostage crisis. Right. Okay, because he's the guy who basically gave the Shah of Iran the bill of health or the ill bill of health to be operated on in the States and that kicked off the 1979. So he's this amazing surgeon in America. But he's also the guy who's responsible for why American fighter pilots and Navy pilots all carry shark repellent. Because during the wars, he basically showed that the pilots were basically getting eaten alive by sharks. And so that he persuaded the army to basically give them shark repellent. From a food perspective, he's probably more interesting because he also is the first guy to basically, when we go traveling now, most of us know that if you go to somewhere where you wouldn't normally drink the water, you also shouldn't have the ice, and you should be careful with anything like an unwashed salad. He's the guy who basically worked all that stuff out in the 50s and 60s. Yeah, fascinating guy, brilliant guy. He also, though, produced this extraordinary paper in the 1950s about a group of people off the coast of Panama called the Yuna, where he basically observed that they had very, very low stress rates, and they had amazing heart health, and that also, that they lived for a very long time. But he didn't do much else with it except write about it. And then in the 1990s, a guy called Hollingworth, who was at Harvard, discovered this and was looking to try and find whether there was a genetic aspect to people's heart health. He went out to the UNO, observed their extraordinary heart health, but then he discovered something strange, which is that when they moved, for example, from this island, or this Panama, to the big towns, it stops. So he thought, there must be diet. And then he looked back at the stuff that's being written about by Keane, and one of the things which Keane had noted, by the way, you can't keep eating chocolate.

Matt Eastland:  
I'm sorry, for all the listeners who are listening, you're probably getting me kind of chewing away here, masticating.

Spencer Hyman:  
And what he discovered is that Keane had written about this extraordinary cacao. And he basically thought, okay, I found the

solution. And this is where it all gets a little bit murky. But he then basically produces a whole bunch of very famous papers, all of which are paid for by Mars, although Mars aren't quite overt about this in the early days. But it then turns out about a decade later that this can't be right, because some other anthropologists come out and they discover that actually the drinking chocolate that these Kuna, who are drinking today, is basically the same junk that they were basically drinking in Panama City and they're bringing in from Colombia. And it's not this sort of super high flavanol stuff that Keane was writing about. But since then, if you read almost any study about why chocolate's great for your heart, it will all revert back to this stuff and be on flavanols. So there's no doubt that cacao seeds, not beans, are very, very high in flavanols. And depending on the way you ferment them, they can also maintain a lot of that flavanol. and also the anthocyanins. Hence why the fermentation process is so important. But also, a lot of the steps you use in ultra processing, like for example, nib roasting, where you heat to a much, much higher degree, will destroy the fibre. It'll just entangle the fibre, so you won't be able to absorb it so easily. And it will also destroy a lot of the flavanols, the antioxidants, the anthocyanins. And so you won't be getting all those properties. So let me step back. So here's the thing about craft chocolate. It's all about designing to maximize all those good stuff. The bad thing about mass-processed chocolate is that on the one hand, it doesn't have all those benefits because the processes it uses are industrial and they just destroy them. Alkalization is similar. And on the other side, they also add a bunch of stuff, which is absolutely disastrous for you. So, you know, the sort of the Michael Pollan, you know, if you don't have it in your kitchen, don't buy if it's in the product, you know, stick with that one. And so you don't want to basically be sticking PGPR and other emulsifiers in your gut via a chocolate bar. And you want to be really, really careful with that.

Matt Eastland:

Okay, got it. And I guess the thing that kind of then jumps out to me, I mean, we can get into the depth of other things, and I'd also really like to talk about your kind of backstory as well. But if knowing all of that, then why, why is it kind of why have we ended up here? You know, what is it? Is it just that it's I guess this is just much cheaper and therefore you know the other question I have is why therefore is the price you know still going up and what can we do to make craft chocolate more accessible if there are so many great health and environmental benefits to it?

Spencer Hyman:

That's a fantastically good question. And it's a question which I often chat about to guys in the wine industry and coffee industry and everything else. Because let me give you some facts and figures. Coffee and chocolate are both about the same. They're both about \$120 billion. Specialty coffee is about 15 to 20% of all coffee sales. Kraft chocolate 0.2, 0.3%. And so you sort of think, well,

why is that? And I think there is a bunch of different reasons for it. But I think one of the fundamental ones is that coffee is a relatively simple and very social upgrade. So if you want to impress you know, somebody who you're trying to hire, or impress a meeting, and you have a meeting, you're not going to go to a common or garden coffee shop, you're going to go to one of those great, you know, you're going to go to, you know, proof rock, or you're going to go to colonos, or you're going to go to one of those specialty ones, which it's a way of sort of like, you know, upgrading and showing that you're thinking about it. Similarly, it's a very social activity. So you'll be going there often with somebody who knows about coffee, but even if they're not knowing about coffee, you're going to get the barista and inadvertently, you're going to basically sort of by osmosis just acquire all this expertise. Similarly, if you go and have a glass of wine, we can have a craft beer, you know, in a pub, somebody's gonna explain it to you. And it's social because you see other people doing it. And it's a way of I don't want to sort of use you know, use junky words, but it's sort of, it is a way of sort of establishing status to say, I know about this, as well as the fact that it tastes great and it is just much better. So I think, and then if you look at chocolate, let's be candid. Most people, chocolate is something you get out of a vending machine, or you basically get it from a, you know, a corner store, or you get it from a supermarket, and you have it sitting at your desk when you need a bit of a pickup, in private, as a guilty secret. Now, I'm all in favor of having, you know, treats, But it's very difficult to basically substitute Kraft chocolate for that. Because we can't get access to it, but also because what's the addictive stuff inside coffee? Caffeine. What's the addictive stuff inside wine or beer? Alcohol. What's the addictive stuff inside mass-produced chocolate? Sugar. Right. What do we not have a lot of? Yeah, you passed.

Matt Eastland:

You passed. We haven't rehearsed that, guys. We haven't rehearsed that one.

Spencer Hyman:

I was like, oh god, here we go. We haven't rehearsed that one. But so we don't have the stuff that gives you that sugar hit. We actually have to teach you the difference between taste and flavor. Right, I see. And so if you ask the people who subscribe to Cocoa Runners what they love about chocolate, and when they have it, they'll basically tell you, I normally have it with my partner, end of a meal, which is great. We'll talk about the second stomach in a minute. And you have it at the end of a meal as a digestive, and you just savor it. And that is great, but it's not a simple upgrade. We've almost got to educate people about how to appreciate the flavor and to teach them that chocolate is not just a vector and a vehicle to put loads of sugar in you.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, it's just the challenge, though, is how do you do it in a way which doesn't make chocolate and craft chocolate sound almost like elusive, exclusive, elitist? How do you manage that? You know, because from what you've said, as with a lot of guests on the show, it seems like a simple choice. It's like, well, why would you go for the mass produced stuff versus going for this? It tends to come down to cost and convenience, I imagine. with a lot of things, but how do you make sure that people are making the right choices? And is it, going back to the top of the show, is it that we need to be saying to people, you need to eat less chocolate, but just make better choices in the chocolate that you eat?

Spencer Hyman:

I think that's definitely a start. I think it's basically, it's thinking about how to appreciate and the benefits you get from chocolate and acquiring it as a habit. So, you know, let's take a silly example. Brits never used to drink wine until the 60s or 70s. And one of the reasons why we now drink wine is because of the genius of a guy called Len Evans. And what he worked out is that Brits always drank beer. We always drank beer and we always had it in pubs. Yep. And then we started to go on cheap package summer holidays to the Costa del Sol and to France, and we discovered this wonderful red and white stuff. And Len Evans' genius was to basically say to the Australians two things. First of all, you've got to get your wine into pubs because that's where Brits drink. So you're thinking about like, what's the occasion? How do you grab that? And by the way, I think specialty coffee has been brilliant at that because it's basically meeting places and, you know, all that sort of stuff. And then the second thing that Levins did, which is even smarter, was he said, remember, Brits don't drink and eat at the same time. So think about most European wines. They're designed to be had with food. And that's how Australian wine was too. You look back at the labels in the 60s and 70s, and they've got sort of Hermitage and Claret, and they've got all these weird names. He said, make them really simple to understand, so just put the name of the grape on it, and then design them so that they work really, really well with a bag of crisps.

Matt Eastland:

For all our European listeners out there, I apologise for all of us Brits, but yeah, wine and crisps.

Spencer Hyman:

But I think sort of figuring out what the occasion is and figuring out where to do it is right. So I think that, you know, chocolate actually has done some pretty extraordinary things. So what the Kraft chocolate hasn't yet had is what I sort of call the salted caramel moment. So when I was growing up, and I'm a bit older than you, you had to be deeply cool and ironic, which I definitely wasn't, to take basically, you know, a box of Quality Street to a

dinner party. It's no disrespect to Quality Street, but like, you know, it's very easy to take a bottle of wine. And you should take some flowers if you go to a dinner party. And if you know if 100% and if you're living somewhere where you've got getting a great access to Neil's yard or something, take some cheese too. But, you know, what happened in the late 1990s, 2000s, is we discovered this amazing stuff, by the way, which is a perfect Bliss Point food, which is salted caramel. And those truffles you can now take to dinner parties. Now, some craft chocolate makers are making them, but, like, I always take bars to dinner parties, and, you know, the first few times that somebody invites me, they think you're completely bonkers. But once they basically got into it, two or three craft chocolate bars telling the story behind them on a board is just the most amazing way to end a meal. But probably there's an in-between stage, which is sort of, you know, what we've now got, like Neapolitans. So Maru, the Vietnamese maker, makes them. Rucat makes them too. So little boxes. So I think we've got to be a little bit more thinking about what's the format and what we're going to do. But the other thing which you picked up on, I think, earlier on when we were talking is, it's education. So, you know, you've done the WSET. If you teach somebody about something, they're going to get more fun and games out of it. Sure.

Matt Eastland:

I mean, I think that... Appreciation goes up so much.

Spencer Hyman:

Yeah, flavour is, to me, it's like swimming. It's not like running. Do you want me to explain what I mean by that? If you give anyone a pair of... Please do, because I'm a big swimmer, but I'm not a great runner, so... OK, OK, so then this may not work, but I'll still try. Here's my sort of analogy, though, which is if you give anyone a pair of running shoes and you tell them to run every day for a month, after a week, they're probably going to hate you and want to kill you. But after a month, if you've really done it, you've got into the rhythm, you've got into the flow, and it's actually sort of quite enjoyable. And you don't really need to be shown too much about how to do it. Swimming, if you drop somebody into a swimming pool, or in a pond in my case, every day for a month, after a week, they're going to want to kill you. After a month, they probably are going to kill you. Because you have to be shown a little bit about how to do it. And I think the same is true of taste and flavour. So taste, we all get instinctively. I mean, we are innate, you know, we've got, we don't like bitterness, we don't like astringency, there's no taste, but anyway, we don't like sourness too much. But we do like sweetness, because it's a sign of calories, we do like fattiness again. Flavour, though, we have to learn to appreciate and enjoy. And that's the advantage of eating together, breaking bread together, because you slow it down. And that gives the flavour aromas a chance to come through. We need to teach people how to use chocolate, I think, as a means to learn flavour. That's what we do in our own virtual tastings. So when we come we and when we do our

in person tastings, we do this. And by the end of it, everyone is just sort of blown away by, okay, I now get what flavor is. And I now get what you were talking about earlier on with this wave, this length, this depth. Once you get people into that, then there's no going back to your mass produced Even your sort of, you know, supposedly single origin 70% which doesn't necessarily have PGPR and soy lecithin in it. It's going to be really flat if it comes out of a supermarket or a well-known brand because the way they've made it is it's just not going to be able to give you any flavour.

Matt Eastland:

Okay, got it. Okay, well I've already learned loads and I also feel very... I'm suddenly feeling quite guilty of my choices which is...

Spencer Hyman:

No, no, no, no, you shouldn't feel that, then I've done my job really badly.

Matt Eastland:

No, no, no, absolutely not.

Spencer Hyman:

You're helping me on my own journey, which is... But I think that making people feel guilty about one of the great pleasures in their life, because chocolate is the most amazing luxury and the most amazing delight. But no, but all chocolate is, I mean, because, you know, it's sweet and it's got this amazing mouthfeel. And I'm not against people eating junk chocolate. You know, chocolate digestives, I would much rather that you basically got a digestive and melted some good chocolate on it, but if you are in a push, Get a chocolate digestive. Because it's still enjoyable. It is still very enjoyable. It's a classic thing. But if you want your PGPR, if you want your emulsifiers, even your diet chocolate digestives, they're a great example of it. But seriously, enjoy food for what it is. But once you learn to savour, you're on the path to fixing the planet.

Matt Eastland:

So talking about the path, so we haven't actually spoken about your own backstory, because I mean, just for our listeners, where you've come from to where you are now is quite different. So how did you end up here? I mean, was it just that you've always had this fascination with chocolate and flavour and those sorts of things, and therefore you just naturally moved into it? Or did you have like your lightning bolt, eureka moment? You're like, this is what I need to be doing for the rest of my life.

Spencer Hyman:

I don't think it was a lightning bolt. But you're right, I do have a slightly odd background. So just, and some of it is relevant. So I used to make Cabbage Patch Dolls in Thailand, then I translated video games in Japan. That latter part is relevant, because when I was in Japan, I learned Japanese with a guy who was actually worked for Bongras, which is the big French cheese company, but they also own Valrhona. And he introduced me to amazing chocolate then and there. It's not quite the same as it was then. So that's when I first really tasted chocolate. And then I came back to the UK. I ended up launching Amazon software, video games, electronics, and toy stores, doing a lot in e-commerce. I worked around the corner from here because I was the COO at Last.fm, so I got into music recommendations and tech. And then the music industry taught me something, which is that I think music has got the best form of discovery that anyone has ever come up with for media. How do you mean? It's called DJs. Oh, I see. Yeah. The ultimate curator. The ultimate curator. Even the top 40. You know, music is the most amazing way of helping people discover stuff. And what Amazon showed me is that if the secret of physical retail is location, location, location, the secret of e-commerce up until relatively recently was search, search, search. You know what you want. And so winning the search was really important. Trying to be Amazon at that game, I know well from being an Amazon is very difficult. So with my business partner, great guy called Simon Pelthorpe, he and I basically came up with this idea that we needed to find some areas which really suited what we sort of call curated discovery. And chocolate is an obvious one. And at that point, craft chocolate was just getting going. So when we started a decade ago, there were like two or three craft chocolate makers in the UK. So there was Duffy's, there was Willy's, and there was just Pump Street.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, no, Willy's is still great. Absolutely brilliant. And Duffy's... Fantastic documentary I remember watching.

Spencer Hyman:

Yeah, and Duffy's, you know, he's an absolute superstar. And Chris Brennan and Joanna from Pump Street, also amazing. But it was just sort of emerging. So we thought, well, we'll get into it. And what we're going to do instead of you know, sort of, you know, giving you a top 40 every month, we're going to give you a monthly playlist. So we came up with this idea of doing a monthly discovery service or subscription, whereby you get four different bars of Kraft chocolate every month. The only choice you have is whether you want milk only, 100% only, which those are pretty minorities. Most people either take the dark only, so four bars of dark, or a mix, which is a milk or a couple of milks and a couple of darks. And if you take the latter, we make a promise that we will never repeat a bar. Is that right? And we give you tasting notes, and I'll give you a video of me talking about them. And it's all basically designed to sort of get you great chocolates. So no great Eureka moment. But then the more I got into chocolate, that's when I also understood more about

flavour. And I think that if there was a Eureka moment, It's basically talking to people like Professor Barry Smith and James Hoffman, who's the coffee guy, and Rebecca Palmer, who are just brilliant at explaining this concept of the flavour wave. And that's the eureka moment. Unfortunately, it doesn't work anymore just to look at the back of a label and see if the ingredients have got anything ultra processed in it. Yes, that's a great first step. But ultra-processing, you know, the Nova definition, is not just the ingredients, it's also how it's been made. And the great way of telling if, you know, something has been ultra-processed is, it's not going to have length and depth and complexity of flavour. But you've got to get into understanding and appreciating flavour. So if you don't want to be conned by the big food guys, get into flavour.

Matt Eastland:

All right, you heard it here people get into flavor I mean and I was just saying this to our producer before we got into show it is the gateway Yeah, you know if you can get that right and you get people to make better choices with flavor Then the other things around health and sustainability that will come with it But you you have to you have to nail flavor.

Spencer Hyman:

First of all, you do because we're we're pre-programmed We are pre-programmed to eat stuff. That's good for us. And also if it's got flavor it weren't to be messed around with by food companies. And food companies mess around in two ways. They put in stuff that's bad for you, but they also take away the stuff that's good for you because of the processes and the way they do it. And once you've got that in you, it's great. And the other thing is, is that flavour requires high quality ingredients. That doesn't mean price. So, you know, supermarket chocolate bars, one, two, three quid. Kraft chocolate bars, four, five, you know, maybe a few, seven or eight. And we've got a few which are a bit more max, they come from America and they've got to be imported. But you're getting the world's very, very best at under 10 quid. So it's not, and you know, you'll eat less good chocolate than you will basically by scoffing five big bars. And you know that the farmers are being properly paid with long-term contracts.

Matt Eastland:

And that's just one of those guarantees as part of Kraft chocolate. When you eat Kraft chocolate, you just know that the farmers are being paid, it's being done ethically, it's sustainable, and you get the health benefits. So it's just that mark.

Spencer Hyman:

So we set up Cocoa Runners with the aim of basically, we don't sell a bar unless we've talked to the maker. and we not just talked in most cases I've also visited their factories or at a minimum I've



been on a zoom tour with them right so I've been to all the ones in America I've been to some of the ones in South America but every single maker we have I've talked to personally and we've got over 150 makers we've got over 1500 bars and I know where not just they've all been made and how they've been made but I also know where the beans come from right And that's important because most chocolate, I know it sounds really stupid, but it's not made directly from beans, made by that maker. Most chocolate is made by something called couverture. And that's basically one of the reason why Belgium is well known for chocolate. By the way, if there's one hint for all your listeners, it's this is gonna make me incredibly unpopular. Be careful. Basically, the word Belgium and chocolate is not quite as direct a correlation as you think it is. Or if it is a direct correlation, it's the other way. Right. So basically, up until relatively recently, Belgium had never won any of the great awards for its bars, you know, the Academy or the International Chocolate Awards. And the reason why Belgium is famous for chocolate is because actually a guy called Oskar Callebaut, back in the 20s, invented something called couverture, which is basically, I'm going to be a little bit injudicious in my wording here, but it's a bit like ready meals for chefs. So basically, it means that you could supply chocolate makers or anybody else who wanted chocolate with big vats of the stuff, or cocoa liquor, which all they had to do was remould and remelt it. And in fact, most chocolate sold in the UK is made out of liquor, not a mass. So it's not actually made by people buying beans and then making chocolate. So it's a bit like going to a restaurant. When you buy most chocolate bars, like the one in your pocket, basically what they've done is they bought the mass, and then they've just added a bit of flavouring to it. So if you went to a restaurant and somebody basically served you a microwave meal,

Matt Eastland:

probably wouldn't be too delighted but that's what most chocolate makers are doing well that's really good to know it's this is kind of also hysterical because our um Headquarters is in Belgium.

Spencer Hyman:

So I probably probably just inadvertently insulted loads of my colleagues, but I'm sure there are some great Belgian chocolate makers So there's a fantastic couple called Mike and Becky Confusingly, they're actually called Julia and Bjorn and they're Russian and German, but they make amazingly good chocolate Okay inside Belgium. Okay, so, you know hats off to them and there and they know you go a little bit There's lots of them in the Netherlands the chocolate makers. There's mellow and

Matt Eastland:

Thank you. Thank you for thank you for adding some extra bits there for us. Really appreciate that. Spencer, we've we've kind of jumped around in different in different places, which I love as you know, kind of like an organic conversation just in terms of like the

future of chocolate. So let's let's kind of going forwards five, 10, 15 years. Can you To your point around the fact that as of yet, chocolate hasn't had that moment where, you know, it's not like wine, you're in a bar, you know, with all your friends. Can you see a future where that that is actually a thing, where you have like tasting chocolate bars, you go out with your friends and family? And A, is that is that going to be a thing? And B, you know, from your perspective and looking at all the trends around this, Do you think that consumers are ready to kind of embrace Kraft chocolate?

Spencer Hyman:

Yes, I do I very much do and I think that there's a couple of elements that I think the first thing is is that we're not going to replace snacks We're not on alternatives to snacks What we are is an amazing opportunity to teach people about flavor and to enjoy what you can get from chocolate and will probably be consumed in different ways at different points. So I think that just as you know cheese used to be something when I was growing up that I basically got out of a can or out of a tube and I basically had it you know and now that you know you can't go to a dinner party in whatever without being given a cheese board I think that will happen with chocolate increasingly. I think the other thing that will happen is that we will basically discover that chocolate is an amazing bonding experience. You know, lots of people love going to, as you sort of said, wine bars, but also to wine tastings. You know, this generation is not quite as into alcohol as before, but they're still into flavor. What better place to take your date than to a chocolate tasting?

Matt Eastland:

That's very true, that's a great tip. So in terms of the start of your craft chocolate journey where would you recommend people start?

Spencer Hyman:

Oh come to a tasting, definitely come to a tasting because once you've got into it and once you've got what it's all about which is about flavour and about just understanding that you need to unwrap the stories behind the bars. you're away. And once you know that basically this is the most amazing present to take to the next dinner party, or the most amazing present for your mum, or your dad, or for, you know, your valentine or anything else, it's just you are off to the races. But it is education. And you know, where else can you get the world's very, very best for under a tenner, where you are helping save the planet, pay farmers properly, and it's going to be healthier.

Matt Eastland:

I love that. I love that. I mean, you've totally changed the way I see chocolate. Thank you, Spencer. And this, the chocolate I'm eating now, which is super citrusy, I absolutely love this.

Spencer Hyman:

So thank you. And on behalf of Frederick, and more importantly, on behalf of Ketchy, the people who grow the beans for that, thank you. So back on stuff that I've done before, I used to do Last of Fam, which is all about music recommendations. And this is one of the things that we do for chocolate, too. There are lots of different ways of doing recommendations. You can do collaborative filtering. You can do tagging. But what we've actually done is we built basically profiles of all the different chocolates. So you're describing their various notes. So if you tell us what sort of notes or even what foods you like, we basically can recommend bars that you will enjoy. So I can basically suggest that on the grounds that you like that bar, the Catchy the Latua bar. You would also very much like the sirene interpretation. So that's made by Taylor Who's a guy from in Vancouver Island off in Canada, and he has a very similar flavor profile to that You would also though interestingly probably like a couple of the bars from Quantu which are very bright and citrusy But not all of them go that way right and you might even like some of the ones from another amazing Scandinavian chocolate maker called Fjark who used the same beans to create a few and So we built a recommendation engine, too. So there really is a journey to this. There really is a journey. But also what you'll discover is that if you go into any box, if you subscribe, once you find one bar that you like, we'll start to be able to help you find other bars that you'll like, too. And the great thing is that we'll show you flavors that you didn't know you could get out of chocolate. And then you can go on that journey, too.

Matt Eastland:

And if I'm with somebody who has no, necessarily no idea about flavour profiles, but I know what food I like, could I come to you and say, I really love spicy Thai, you know, aromatic kind of food.

Spencer Hyman:

So you'd do well with, for example, Fossa's salted egg caramel bar. But interestingly, for example, if you like, this is a slightly strange one, if you like bananas, or if you like very sort of earthy green vegetables, the odds are that you will like quite a lot of bars crafted from Ecuadorian cacao. So, for example, Denny's bars from Connections would work quite well. Or, for example, sort of a Pump Street's Hacienda Lemon, which is an estate in, I can't remember if it's Manaville or Los Rios, in Ecuador. They have these sort of green earthy vegetal notes, which back onto the wine, if you like Cabernet Franc, with that sort of, you know, that sort of earthy and sort of green and almost eucalyptus-y notes, they go phenomenally well with that too. They really pair well.

Matt Eastland:

So you've got a chocolate entry point, a food entry point, and

potentially if you're into your wines also a wine entry point.

Spencer Hyman:

Oh yeah, wine entry points are really great. So that wine and chocolate is just, so basically if you've got any wine at the end of a meal, especially if it's red wine, just basically break open the chocolate. Dark chocolate, red wine, and you will just find that it's basically 1 plus 1 equals 33. It's just a completely different ballgame of experience.

Matt Eastland:

Ben, so you and I are going to become very good friends. I can see this now. I can see this now. It'll be great. Thanks again. Can I ask, this is going to be a really unfair question, because obviously you have a lot of bars and a lot of suppliers. Do you have a favourite craft chocolate?

Spencer Hyman:

So I have an answer to this, which is that, and you as an expectant father will sympathise with this, this is a bit like being asked, which is your favourite child?

Matt Eastland:

I did think it was a bit of an unfair question.

Spencer Hyman:

So I think the answer is that we taste probably every week, I don't know, anywhere between 20 to 200 bars. And very, very few of them do we actually put through to our library. We've got about 1,500 bars in the library. Or do we put it in a box? So our guarantee is that basically we know where the beans come from. We know how it's been crafted. But we've also tasted it. And it's not just my taste. It's the rest of the team's and other people who we have in too. So that we know they all taste great. So I hope that any bar you get from Cocoa Runners, you will go on a great flavor journey and it will be a great gateway into the world of saving the planet and fixing your health. Amazing. And enjoying a flavor.

Matt Eastland:

And on that note then, so where can our listeners go to find out more about you and Cocoa Runners?

Spencer Hyman:

Please come to [CocoaRunners.com](http://CocoaRunners.com) and even if you're not in London to come to an in-person tasting. Every week we do virtual tastings and the way we do that is we literally do them and we send the packages anywhere in the world. You can either buy a pack of chocolate

designed for one or two people or for a family of four, five, six or seven. It's the same chocolates in both. It's about 10 different chocolates. And basically, we will take you on a journey of discovery where you will be tasting along with us. It's very interactive. There's a quiz at the end, which if you win, you get prizes. And you will basically learn more than you will ever need to win a pub quiz about chocolate.

Matt Eastland:

That in itself will be enough for some people. But yeah, I love that. Okay, and what about yourself? Where can people find out more about you?

Spencer Hyman:

Probably just on the website. Yeah on the website. I'm gonna try and write a book so that will be coming out at some point.

Matt Eastland:

Oh, you must come back on the show when you've done that. I think we should do one on flavour. Okay. All right. It's a date. It's a date. Spencer, thank you so so much. It's been fascinating learning everything about chocolate and I, for one, am absolutely going to be making better choices from now on, so thank you. We'll convert you. You have, you absolutely have. Thank you. Thank you all for listening in. So this has been the Food Fight podcast. As ever, if you'd like to find out more, head over to the EIT Food website at [eitfood.eu](http://eitfood.eu). Also, please join the conversation via the hashtag EIT Food Fight on our X channel at EIT Food. And if you haven't already, please hit the follow button so you never miss an episode. That's it for now, everyone. See you next time.