Chocolate to become 'like Caviar'

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A rapid decline in cocoa production from farmers in Africa has experts predicting that chocolate could be as rare and expensive as caviar in 20 years.

Low returns from the difficult and costly process of cocoa growing has prompted many farmers to switch to other crops, the Independent reports.

A shortage in bulk production will likely raise the cost of chocolate drastically, Nature Conservation Research Council director John Mason said.

"In 20 years chocolate will be like caviar," he was quoted saying.

"It will become so rare and expensive that the average Joe just won't be able to afford it."

Smallholders make up around 95 percent of cocoa producers and many make as little as 80 cents a day to grow the plants.

Despite the rising price of cocoa on commodities markets, little of the profit makes its way back to the farmers, most of whom live in West Africa.

As a result, many farmers in countries like the Ivory Coast and Ghana are moving into other agricultural produce like rubber and palm oil.

UK Academy of Chocolate chair Sara Jayne Stanes said consumers must get used to more expensive, more luxurious chocolate.

"Fine chocolate, like fine wine, will cost considerably more, as cocoa farmers stop leaving the land in search of better-paid jobs in the cities," she was quoted saying.

British company Cadburys said while the exodus of farmers is a rising concern, the expansion of Fair Trade initiatives should curb the decline.