The Grocer

Focus On: Chocolate Confectionery

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FEATURE ONE: Cocoa sourcing transparency

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Chocolate makers have made admirable gains in transparency in the past year. Waitrose has partnered with one brand and another brand has unveiled "fully traceable" chocolate bars. But the bar is about to be raised again. By December 30, companies operating in the EU will need to prove their supply chains do not contribute to forest degradation anywhere in the world. Which brands are currently leading the way on supply chain transparency – which are behind? And how prepared is the category for new legislation?

Transparency: What gains have chocolate brands and retailers made on transparency in the past year? How transparent is the category – what percentage of chocolate is currently from traceable sources?

New legislation: How will EU anti-deforestation laws affect the category? Are most chocolate brands already compliant? How will they need to adjust? Will this be costly?

Supply chain squeeze: A global cocoa shortage means chocolate prices have risen nearly 19% in the last year. How are the various players in the supply chain – from cocoa farmers to consumers – affected by rising prices? Has the price squeeze affected the push for greater transparency?

Own label vs brands: In a tight year for brands, own label has mustered 2.2% volume growth. What, besides using competitive pricing, are retailers doing to make their products more attractive? Does own label chocolate face the same scrutiny as branded chocolate on sustainability?

Weather forecast: What's the cocoa crop outlook for the coming year? With global weather increasingly unpredictable and cocoa prices rising again this year, how are chocolatiers shoring up supplies?

FEATURE TWO: Chocolate confectionery

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From flavoured hot chocolate pods to pudding-inspired dessert bars, strawberry chocolate and retro throwbacks to '90s favourites, it's clear chocolate brands are creating excitement. HFSS rules and supply chain issues may have put the squeeze on the category, but NPD is still going strong. Can it prove a turnaround for flagging chocolate volumes? Which brands are leading the way on innovation?

Innovation: How are brands diversifying their ranges? What are the main types of innovation – are they in format, flavour, etc? How many brands are venturing into other categories, and are many doing so through partnerships?

HFSS: With nearly two years of HFSS experience under their belts, have brands fully adjusted to back-of-store fixtures? How many have leaned into their core offer – versus made their products healthier?

UPF: What impact has the ultra-processed food debate had on chocolate? Is it fuelling sales of more premium products?

Easter and premium: Amid volume declines in other chocolate sectors, Easter and premium gifts have grown unit sales. How have they managed to buck the trend? What can brands do around the year to tap into consumers' greater willingness to splash out for special occasions?

Promotions: Despite rising prices, chocolate promotions are up 14.3% over last year. How effective have they been? Are we likely to see more of them?

Innovations: Identify four new products or product ranges that have ideally not appeared in The Grocer before. Supply details, including launch date and rsp, and a hi-res picture.