

The 3 Dark Sides of the Avocado Boom

Avocado. Beloved Millennial food and the most photographed food on Instagram.

It is a nutritious superfruit loaded with healthy fats and fibers that help to significantly reduce cholesterol levels. Furthermore, it is loaded with powerful antioxidants, it may help relieve symptoms of arthritis and even help prevent cancer.

The benefits of avocado are endless.

It is then no wonder we love to put it in salads, can't wait to use it for a creamy cold soup or, of course, for a delicious guacamole.

However, the popularity of avocado worldwide has caused many negative side-effects of its production. Therefore, before we buy that unique green fruit and enjoy a tasty guacamole, let's stop for a moment and think about the devastating consequences that our fetishization of avocado has caused to the environment and to the people who live in regions where avocado is produced.

1) Deforestation

The avocado overproduction causes huge environmental problems. It is especially evident in Michoacán, a state located in the Mexican Bajío, where the boom of the avocado industry has caused deforestation and ecosystem destruction. It is estimated that around 600 to 1000 hectares of forests are destroyed in order to turn them into land for avocado plantations. Pine forests, home of various indigenous species (like, for example, the monarch butterfly), are being destroyed to make agricultural fields and craters in order to use the area to grow avocados.

2) It demands a huge amount of water

Moreover, avocado requires a huge amount of water to grow properly. It takes 1000 liters of water to grow 1 kilogram of avocado. For comparison, in order to grow 1 kilogram of broccoli only 45 liters of water are needed. Unfortunately, despite the devastating effect avocado farming has on the environment, it is just the tip of the iceberg of the negative side of the avocado boom.

3) Organized crime

On a positive note, the huge growth in demand for avocados has also brought money to the growing regions, especially to previously mentioned Michoacán. The locals even came up with the name "green gold" for avocados grown there.

However, the local cartels have also noticed how lucrative the avocado business is, so they are constantly threatening poor farmers. The locals are thus forced to pay the cartels for every kilogram of avocado they export. If they refuse, they risk their orchards being burned, or even their own lives to be taken.

Because of this, avocado has now lost its nickname "green gold" and become "blood guacamole". And the authorities are helpless, so the locals are forced to form their own defense groups to protect themselves ("avocado police").

What can we do?

After realizing that a fruit so popular and so beloved has a dark side like this, it is difficult to turn our heads and just keep purchasing avocado with ease. The question that arises here is what can be done to minimize the effect that the avocado industry has on the environment and the people who live in the regions where it is produced. It would be easy to just say that we should stop buying avocado.

But let's think for a moment. Will boycotting avocado really help farmers who grow it? If the cartels are already exploiting them, would it really be ethical to hit them in their wallets again? Avoiding avocado would in the end just ruin the families that depend on it. And although cartels have completely taken over the avocado farming in some regions, it is unlikely that refusing to eat avocado is going to destroy them, since avocado business is just one of the sectors from which they can profit.

As for the negative impact avocado boom has on the environment, maybe it would be best to better regulate the laws behind its production, in opposition to boycotting avocados and punishing even the farmers that obey those laws. Therefore, it is important to educate ourselves and to raise awareness about what we eat and where our food comes from. As consumers, we have the power to decide how to use that knowledge and what to purchase with our money.

SOURCES

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