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Let's talk about nuts. It's #LesFoodFacts time

Ok, let's start at the most obvious question. Why are nuts so bloody expensive? You need to understand what nuts are and how they grow and how they're processed.

The price is based on processing and also on market demand. Let me explain those 2 points first #LesFoodFacts

Let me start with the most expensive nut in the world. The Macadamia nut.

Origin? Queensland, Australia. Eaten by Aborigines for centuries and called "Kindal Kindal" until the colonisers landed and renamed them after one of themselves. Some dude called Macadam #LesFoodFacts

Macadamia trees need to grow for around 10 years before they start producing fruit.
The fruit then needs to be harvested by hand, not machine, as they are so varied only a human eye (and hand) can sort them out.

They also only thrive in tropical places. #LesFoodFacts

Macadamia nuts also contain the highest fat content of all nuts. They're on average 80% fat.
The fat in them is good for you though, like olive oil. So the health market is one of the aspects that has driven the demand up. #LesFoodFacts

South Africa, right now, is the biggest producer of Macadamia nuts. The Chinese market adores Macadamia and as their middle class grows, the demand is growing exponentially as well...and this also drives the price up. #LesFoodFacts

All good? Right? Nope. We all know once the Chinese like something they figure a way to make it themselves.

So right now Chinese agriculture is planting Macadamia trees like crazy. They reckon in a few years the price is gonna crash because of this. #LesFoodFacts

So that model roughly covers the basics as to why nuts are expensive. The trees take forever to mature and once they do, they're fragile and need a certain environment and also need manual labour. So only a limited amount of nuts get to the market. #LesFoodFacts

Ok, let's go back into the history of nuts now.

The majority of nuts are from ancient times and were discovered and consumed by indigenous people. Pecan nuts are one of the oldest nuts in the world. They were consumed by native Americans who would crush them and boil them.

After boiling the crushed nuts, the nuts would split from the oils in them and the native Americans would use that oil to cook.

Voila. Nut oils were discovered. The oils were full of flavour but were also good for health and well-being. This was key to their popularity

Pecan nuts grow well in dry areas, they need sunlight for 80% of the year as long as their roots are watered regularly. The northern Cape in SA is full of pecan nut farms. They are one of the biggest pecan nut regions in the world. #LesFoodFacts

Nut oils were originally created for cooking but as their health benefits have been documented over the years and all these hair product people have discovered them the demand has skyrocketed. ■

One example is Argan oil.
Argan is grown in a small area of Morocco, in the Atlas Mountains. Originally Argan oil was used by locals for their cooking but it is now predominantly used for beauty products. It is rich in Linoleic and Oleic acids, which are awesome for skin and hair

For an Argan fruit to give you good quality oil the fruit takes about 1 year to ripen. You cannot pick it off the tree and you can't shake the tree and force the fruit to fall.

The tree produces an acid that destroys the good stuff in the Argan fruit. It's a defence mechanism

So the myth about the best Argan nuts coming from goats who eat ripe Argan fruit was born.

In actual fact, Argan fruit (which has the nut) have to be sorted by hand and it's a labour intensive process. The limited fruit and manual labour is why it's so expensive.

The process is similar for most nuts.
Oh, speaking of which, technically a nut comes from a fruit from a tree. So peanuts don't qualify as nuts. They're legumes, same family as beans and chickpeas. #LesFoodFacts

Which brings me to the weirdest nut out there. The cashew nut. This is what a ripe cashew fruit looks like. The nut grows on the OUTSIDE of the fruit (called a cashew apple), unlike other nuts. #LesFoodFacts

The fruit is edible and is eaten by locals. The cashew nut is poisonous when raw.
Well, the skin itself is poisonous actually. Cashews are from the same family as poison ivy. Eating (or touching) the raw nut with its skin on will cause some really hectic reactions. #LesFoodFacts

To get rid of the poison, cashew nuts need to be steamed or roasted. The flesh around the nut is then removed BY HAND. Some unscrupulous business people don't provide gloves, so many labourers have hands that are severely affected by the

process.

The manual labour = high price.

Nuts also have myths about them, take hazelnuts for example. Also hugely popular in China and Chinese cuisine. So much so there was a saying in ancient China that hazelnuts were one of the 5 divine foods given to mankind by god.
Rich in health benefits and vitality.

Walnuts were eaten by the elites in ancient Greece and by the Romans. They were even used as currency at one point.

Almonds are from the middle East and are mentioned in the Old Testament and are linked to modern cuisine and techniques... #LesFoodFacts

Marzipan is an ancient pastry paste made using sugar and almonds. We use it to wrap fruit cakes, wedding cakes and Christmas desserts.

The irony? Westerners found out about it through The Crusades when they slaughtered Arabs. Marzipan is from ancient Middle East #LesFoodFacts

Another fascinating nut is the Brazil nut. One of the biggest nuts. It grows in the Amazon area and looks like a coconut when it is in its seed pods. Funky eh? Not really. If a Brazil nut pod falls and you're under the tree, it can kill you. It is hard as a rock. #LesFoodFacts

Spanish colonisers used Brazil nuts to feed their armies, ironically.

Also fascinating is peanuts. They were fed to slaves and considered food for the poor. It was the slaves who helped spread peanuts from South America to the rest of the world. It's how they ended up in Africa.

Ok, onto the health stuff.

Nuts have phytosterols, it's what your body uses to encourage healthy growth of cell membranes. In short, nuts make your skin and hair really healthy. It's why the beauty and health industries adore them. They also help reduce LDL cholesterol

Nuts are also rich in antioxidants and Omega 3 & 6, elements that help reduce the effects of aging. So the food world is now competing with the health market, the beauty market, the oil producers and actual seed growers (nuts are seeds).

Which is why the prices of nuts is crazy.

Oh, forgot to mention. Nut farming, unlike cocoa and coffee bean farming, is one of the most profitable industries purely because you don't need processing (eg, cocoa is sent to Europe to be turned to chocolate). So farmers make quite a bit from it. It is labour intensive though.