**Let’s talk about: The dark side of Avocados**

Recently, avocados have been climbing the trendy foods ladder. You can hardly scroll through social media and not find a picture of the fruit on toast, in a bowl, an animated smiling avo, avocado desserts and many other treats. A little bit of background to the avocado: it comes from South America, botanically it’s actually a berry with a single large seed, it’s high in oleic acid (monosaturated fat), which is quite beneficial for diets low in animal fat. Seeing how popular avocados are and the abundance of it in the shops and markets, you probably wouldn’t think too much about how it got there. The truth is, [avocados can be quite temperamental to grow](https://sustainabilitymattersdaily.com/10-bizarre-facts-that-describe-the-environmental-impact-of-avocados/). It requires warm weather, but not too hot, a whole lot of irrigation (2000 litres for 1 kg of the fruit), nutrient rich soil and special pesticides. It takes ten years, or sometimes more, of this expensive upkeep for an avocado tree to give fruits!

What shocked me the most was something else. Turns out, the avo is on it’s way to become the next ‘[conflict commodity’](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/dec/30/are-mexican-avocados-the-worlds-new-conflict-commodity) similar to the ‘blood diamonds’ as it’s the fuel of organised crime in Mexico. The growth in demand and profitability of the avocado export from Mexico to the US, combined with emerging issues in the drug trade, attracted the [attention of cartels](https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2020/02/07/avocados-mexican-drug-cartels). Some offer ‘services’ such as protection to the avocado growers, while some kidnap plantation owners and demand ransom money. In the series ‘[Rotten](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwi48bSO9bHvAhVDzoUKHQv7D7YQwqsBMAF6BAgDEAg&url=https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ot6W_7hvrM&usg=AOvVaw24TXAo8GwJNSTN4sfb7SSd)’ on Netflix, I heard the story of Manuel Lucatero. In 1998 he was working for a large- scale avocado growers in Michoacan. The Michoacan area is the largest exporter of the ‘green gold’ with about a third of the export to the US coming from this area. One day he was going with the owner to inspect the orchards when they were stopped by a car and kidnapped. Thankfully, the families managed to pay off the cartel and Manuel was released. But the story doesn’t end there. Several years later, after power- shift and the emerge of new cartels, Manuels’ brother and father were kidnapped as well. This time, the kidnappers were asking for 10 million pesos! Manuel had to borrow money and sell part of his lands to cover, money that he still pays off to this day.

And while you not buying and avocado for your breakfast may not change much, shedding light on stories like these might lead to a change in the near future. For example, [a few cafes in the UK](https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/avocados-banned-environment-damage-sustainable-cafe-food-cooking-a8663526.html)  have taken avocado off their menus the hopes of raising awareness towards the issues in the food industry. Nobody knows what will happen, however, this author thinks changes are on the horizon for the ‘green gold’.