

Checking Out Chocolate by Kay Bushnell

Those who desire a sustainable and just world know that it's a good idea to look into how their food is produced. Let's take chocolate production, for example.

Reports in 2001 that child slavery was widespread on cocoa farms in Ivory Coast led to an investigation by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA). The IITA discovered that child labor, of which slave labor is a small part, is a problem on Ivory Coast cocoa farms, where 43 percent of world's cocoa is grown.

Sixty-four percent of the estimated 284,000 children working on cocoa farms in Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon are under the age of 14, according to the IITA. Some impoverished families in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Togo, hand over their children to traffickers, hoping that they will send money home from their new jobs in Ivory Coast. Unfortunately the youngsters are often exploited and forced to work for little or nothing. Some child laborers may not technically be slaves. They work simply because their families need income from all members in order to survive. Many children working on cocoa farms are deprived of schooling and are exposed to dangerous work that involves the use of machetes and pesticides.

When it's time to purchase a chocolate bar or bake brownies consumers can purchase Fair Trade (FT) and/or organic chocolate and enjoy chocolate with a clear conscience. Global Exchange, an international human rights and environmental organization in San Francisco provides information about worldwide chocolate production on its web site and lists the names of chocolate brands that are fair traded - www.globalexchange.org. Contact The Organic Trade Association - www.ota.com - for the names of organic chocolate brands.

Fair Trade is an international monitoring and certification system that guarantees a minimum fair price for cocoa, thus providing farmers a stable income. Among other guidelines FT prohibits exploitive child labor and promotes environmental sustainability. Participating cocoa farms are monitored once a year to ensure compliance. Certified organic chocolate is also a good choice. Peggy Coffman, a spokesperson for Newman's Own Organic Chocolate, says that "organic, certified chocolate is, by its very nature, fair trade."

Changes are taking place in the production of chocolate. Even as they occur, conscientious consumers of chocolate have many choices. Brands that offer Fair Trade and/or organic chocolate include Dagoba Organic - www.chocosphere.com, Endangered Species Chocolate Company - www.chocolatebar.com, Equal Exchange - <http://store.yahoo.com/eeretail>, Green and Blacks - www.greenandblacks.com, Ithaca Fine Chocolates - www.ithacafinechocolates.com, La Siembra/Cocoa Camino - www.lasiembra.com, Omanhene - www.omanhene.com, Newman's Own Organics - www.newmansownorganics.com, Rapunzel Pure Organics, Inc. - www.rapunzel.com, and Yachana Gourmet - www.yachanagourmet.com. Most of them sell both online and retail. Be sure to request chocolate that is free of dairy products.
