

SIMPLE LIFESTYLE

CONSUMER TIPS, No. 9, Feb 2009

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THE LATEST ON CHOCOLATE AND CHILD LABOR

America consumes nearly half of the world's chocolate. While much of our finished chocolate is imported from Canada or Mexico, the cocoa beans come primarily from Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). (Cocoa from Ghana goes to Europe.) They are grown on small farms who must sell to just a few buyers: large US companies like Cargill, Nestle, and Hershey. Without organization and lacking negotiating power, the farmers receive low returns for their crop.

In 2001, the world learned that child labor, including slavery and child trafficking, was epidemic in cocoa production. US Sen. Tom Harkin and Rep. Eliot Engel pushed for product labeling and a ban on chocolate produced with child labor. The industry (using Bob Dole as their lobbyist) fought this off, agreeing instead to voluntary measures to address the "worst forms" of child labor. The industry created the International Cocoa Initiative to implement reform; it has a single staff worker in Cote d'Ivoire. A 2005 deadline came and went with no progress. A new deadline, 2008, has just passed.



A 7-year old wields a machete to harvest cocoa pods. He does not go to school. Note the ironic T-shirt from the World Health Organization.

The conclusion, according to the International Labor Rights Forum, is that "*consumers today have no more assurance than they did eight years ago that trafficked or exploited child labor was not used in the production of their chocolate.*" Moreover, the chocolate industry's certification system is a sham, with no standards or oversight. The full 2008 report is available at:

www.laborrights.org/stop-child-labor/cocoa-campaign/resources/1552

The report includes a discussion of solutions.

One bright spot is that some companies are now using independent oversight organizations to ensure that their chocolate is less likely to involve child labor. Companies like Kraft Foods, Cargill, Nestle, and Mars all make token contributions to various programs to improve labor conditions, but they do not track or label their chocolate. The only way to be sure your chocolate is child labor-free is to look for these labels:

- **Fair Trade Certified** (see <http://www.newdream.org/marketplace/cocoa.php> for where to buy)
- Anything from **Starbucks**

CLEAN COAL DOUBTS

Coal is used to generate about half of the US's electricity, and we have enough to last 200 more years. "Clean coal" refers to a variety of new methods to use regular coal while reducing its two major environmental impacts: air pollution (including acid rain and smog) and CO₂ (greenhouse gas) emissions. Technology has largely addressed the former, and methods to reduce pollution have been used in increasing degrees since the Clean Air Act of 1970. The latter, reducing CO₂ emissions, remains a source of research. It can be done (though some suspect the CO₂ will leak out anyway), but it is very expensive. It is not expected to be commercially-viable until 2020 at the soonest. Some say it is best to stop promoting coal now and begin switching to carbon-free sources of electricity. Massive habitat destruction thru "mountaintop removal" in West Virginia in order to extract coal is another topic altogether. "Clean coal" does not prevent that.

SUGGESTIONS AND IDEAS for future tips are welcome! Email me at hamptons@sbcglobal.net