

# Slave to chocolate

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Monday, 06 August 2007  
Last Updated Monday, 23 June 2008

Almost 70% of the cocoa consumed by the world is grown in West Africa. Most cocoa is grown, specifically, in Cote d'Ivoire. Because there are over half a million cocoa farms there, competition is fierce. Price competition and widespread poverty encourages the use of child, indentured or forced (slave) labor. African children are trafficked across country borders and sold to farms. Read more to find out some of the causes, and how you can choose to help by choosing your chocolate brands.

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## Disturbing Facts

According to [globalexchange.org](http://globalexchange.org), "Subsequent research by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture revealed some 284,000 children between the ages of 9 and 12 working in hazardous conditions on West African cocoa farms. Of these children, it was reported that some 12,000 child cocoa workers that had participated in the study were likely to have arrived in their situation as a result of child trafficking."

## What you can do

If you are concerned, buy organic chocolate. To earn their "organic" label, these foods must not have been produced by any forced, indentured, or slave labor. However - "organic" labels only require that your food be 95% organic. They can put anything they want in that last 5% - imagine your food being 5% pesticides, insecticides, and other -ides. The Environmental Protection Agency says that 60 percent of all herbicides, 90 percent of all fungicides and 30 percent of all insecticides are carcinogenic. (What's bad for fungus seems to be bad for us!) The organic chocolate comes from South America and Ghana and Cameroon in Africa. Strangely, there are no arrangements for fair trade farms in Cote d'Ivoire, which still grows about 43% of the world's cocoa.

"A BBC reporter, Humphrey Hawksley, reported in 2001 that uncounted numbers of children have been reported missing in Mali. Many of them are believed kidnapped and sold as slaves for about US\$30. Other children are sold by their parents. In the poor parts of Mali street sellers and other slum families sometimes sell their children into slavery for a few dollars. It is believed that 15,000 or more children are in forced labor camps in the Cote d'Ivoire, some under 11. They are unlikely ever to be reunited with their families. Often they are held forcibly on farms and made to do tiring work for 80 to 100 hours per week and those who attempt to escape are beaten." -Wikipedia

Mali's Save the Children Fund director, Salia Kante, has stated,

"People who are drinking cocoa or coffee are drinking their blood. It is the blood of young children carrying 6kg of cocoa sacks so heavy that they have wounds all over their shoulders. It's really pitiful to see."

Figure: A child laborer in West Africa

Photo taken from the International Labor Rights Fund

You're probably wondering - since America has a policy not to buy any goods made using slave labor (since 1930 or so) - how can this happen? The answer is that cocoa from the Ivory Coast (a British TV documentary suggests 90% of which is slave-made) is mixed with cocoa from other countries before being sold to chocolate manufacturers on the international market. This action is transparently to obfuscate its origin. My question is, how much money are M&M Mars, Nestle, and Cadbury giving to lobbyists to prevent reform in the cocoa & coffee industries? It is sad that child slave labor is ongoing in cocoa production despite increasing awareness of cocoa trade practices.

-Liz