

Square and Fair

Discover how Fair Trade chocolate helps kids around the world by Clay McLeod

The Bitter Truth about Chocolate

It's the world's favourite sweet treat. We eat three million tones of it every year. But most farmers and their families who grow the cocoa beans to make our beloved chocolate are desperately poor.

Many, many people around the world grow cocoa, so farmers cannot demand a fair price for their crop. Big companies that buy cocoa can shop around until they find farmers who will sell their crop cheap.

Because of cheap coca prices, wages for people who work on the farms are very low. Many families are so poor children are forced to work on cocoa farms and can't go to school. United Nations reports say that more than a quarter million kids are working in dangerous conditions on cocoa farms in West Africa, harvesting cocoa beans with big knives and spraying crops with poisonous pesticides without protective gear like masks. Most kids working on cocoa farms have never even tasted chocolate themselves.

Seventy percent of the world's chocolate comes from the west coast of Africa. Canada buys millions of cocoa products from that area each year. That's why Save the Children Canada and other organizations are encouraging Canadians to buy chocolate that is guaranteed to be free of child labour – chocolate with the Fair Trade certified logo.

Making Fair Trade

Fair Trade is a growing trend involving close to a million farmers around the world. Supporters like Chris Martin from the band Coldplay believe that farmers in poor countries should get a fair price from crops like cocoa beans, coffee, tea, sugar, and bananas so they can support themselves and their families. Fair Trade also makes sure craftspeople get a fair deal on the clothing and household items they sell.

Fair Trade companies guarantee cocoa farmers a fair price for their beans – sometimes twice what many big companies pay. Plus, Fair Trade companies guarantee that farmers will have cocoa buyers for years to come, which helps them save – and borrow – money to buy food, clothes, medicines, and pay school fees so kids can go to school.

In order to be Fair Trade certified, chocolate can't use cocoa or other ingredients that were farmed by child labourers. Kids can help on their family's farm but they must go to school and can't do dangerous work. In Canada, the Fair Trade logo also means that their cocoa beans were produced without harming the environment. Fair Trade chocolate sometimes costs more, but fans are happy to spend their money supporting cocoa farmers and their families.

Fair Trade Fan

Meet Olga Lidia de Jesus. She's 12 years old and lives in a village called Yanabo in the Dominican Republic. All the families in Yanabo are cocoa farmers and many belong to a Fair Trade farmer co-op called CONACADO. She told OWL how Fair Trade has helped her family and her community.

My father is a cocoa farmer. I don't work on the cocoa plantation. I go to school every day in La Taranas. It takes me a lot of time to walk home from the school, and I don't have many friends to play with in the evenings. Besides, I have to do my homework. Because our house doesn't have electricity, I have to go to bed early.

My dad get up early in the morning and goes with a machete (a big knife) to the cocoa farm. Sometimes, neighbours help him with the tougher jobs. At crop time, they carry sacks of cocoa from the farm up to the house on horses.

Life in my family has improved because Fair Trade companies pay my dad better for the cocoa. Now, his co-op can afford to teach people new farming skills. They are organizing a project to bring electricity to the community. This would be a dream! My father says he would never sell his cocoa to the big companies because they never do anything for the community like the Fair Trade companies do.

From Bean to Bar

Nothing better than a bite of your favourite chocolate bar? The delicious cocoa you love travels great distances to tingle your taste buds.

1. Cocoa comes from the tropical cacao (pronounced ka-kow) tree. Most cacao trees grow in West Africa, South America, and Asia.
2. When it's time to harvest the cocoa, the farmers cut cacao pods off the tree with machetes.
3. Then farmers break the pods and scoop out the cocoa beans.
4. Once the beans ferment and dry in the sun, the farmers sell the beans to a local buyer or trade co-op. Beans are shipped to factories, usually in Europe.
5. In factories, workers roast and grind the cocoa beans into cocoa liquor and butter. Then factory workers mix the cocoa liquor and butter with other ingredients, like milk and sugar, to make chocolate.
6. Then businesses package chocolate and distribute it to stores where you can buy it.

Where Do Your Chocolate Dollars Go?

Chew on this! It's not just big chocolate companies and cocoa farmers who profit from chocolate sales. "Coyotes" (as they're called in the Dominican Republic) are people who make money by buying cheap cocoa beans and reselling them at a higher price. When a Fair Trade company buys a farmer's beans, the beans are sold directly to an international Fair Trade chocolate manufacturer. So profits from the sale of beans go to the farmer and back to the community – instead of in coyotes' pockets

Non Fair Trade Chocolate - \$1.00

Ingredients:

- Milk, sugar, cocoa butter, cocoa liquor
- Cocoa plantations often using forced labour, child labour, and dangerous working conditions
- Farmers who can't count on a fair price for their crops
- Poor communities
- Buyers and exporters out to make money
- When a big company sells 100 chocolate bars, about \$5 goes to farmers

Fair Trade Chocolate – \$3.50

Ingredients:

- Milk, sugar, cocoa butter, cocoa liquor
- Fair prices paid to cocoa farmers
- Children going to school
- Families who can get health care when they need it
- Cocoa farmers who can count on sales to the same chocolate company for many years
- Strong communities
- When a Fair Trade company sells 100 bars, about \$35 goes to farmers

A Sweet Way to Make A Difference

By choosing Fair Trade chocolate you can help cocoa-farming families make a fair living from their work.

- Spread the word about Fair Trade chocolate:
Write a letter to the editor of your newspaper about what you have learned and encourage people to buy Fair Trade chocolate
Write a postcard to your local grocery store asking them to sell Fair Trade chocolate. Make sure to mention that you'll buy it!
- Suggest that your school chooses Fair Trade chocolate for its next fundraiser. (La Siembra Co-op: www.lasiembra.com has a Fair Trade fundraising program.)
- Learn more about Fair Trade.
Check out these web sites:
Make Trade Fair: www.maketradefair.com
TransFair Canada: www.transfair.ca

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