

# Valentine Chocolates Tainted by Child Labor



Daniel Rosenthal

A child worker from the Côte d'Ivoire working in the cocoa fields. The Côte d'Ivoire is the largest supplier of cocoa for major US chocolate companies.

**T**his Valentine's Day, many of the heart-shaped chocolates Americans will give their sweethearts will be tainted by the labor of enslaved children.

Hershey's, Nestlé, and the other big chocolate companies know this. They promised nearly a decade ago to set up a system to certify that no producers in their supply chains use child labor. They gave themselves a July 2005 deadline for that, which came and went without meaningful action. A second voluntary deadline sailed by as well in 2008. Then, these companies let a third deadline pass them by at the end of 2010.

Take action to keep child slavery out of your Valentine's Day celebrations. Here's what you need to know.

## Children Exploited for Chocolate

Few Americans had heard of the problem of child labor on cocoa farms before 2001, when reporters Sudarsan Raghavan and Sumana Chatterjee exposed the scandalous conditions under which most US chocolate is made.

In one of their articles, a child slave described his 13-hour work-days on the 494-acre plantation as brutal, filled with harsh physical labor, punctuated by

beatings, and ending with a night of fitful sleep on a wooden plank in a locked room with other slaves.

"The beatings were a part of my life," said the boy, who was sold into slavery at not yet 12 years old. "Any time they loaded you with bags and you fell while you were carrying them, nobody helped you. Instead, they beat you and beat you until you picked it up again."

## More Evidence of Child Labor

The reports shocked some members of Congress into action. That fall,

**WHAT?** When you buy chocolate, buy Fair Trade.

**WHY?** Fair Trade chocolate helps ensure that no slave or child labor was used to grow the cocoa, and workers earn a fair wage.

**WOW!** Fair Trade products are grown using sustainable methods, and many are also organic.

Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY) and Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) prepared bills to require US chocolate companies—by force of law—to certify their products as slave-free. Engel's bill passed the House, but before Harkin's bill could pass the Senate, the chocolate industry had announced a voluntary four-year plan to clean up its own supply chains, without legislation.

Meanwhile, evidence that child slavery still bedevils the chocolate industry isn't hard to find. For example, in late September, a research team from Tulane University (specifically charged by Congress with oversight of the voluntary supply-chain efforts) reported that "the industry is still far from achieving its target by the end of 2010 ... and the majority of children exposed to the worst forms of child labor remain unreached."

The recently released documentary *The Dark Side of Chocolate* by filmmakers Miki Mistrati and U. Roberto Romano takes a less-detached tone, going undercover and exposing child slavery in the cocoa supply chain from the inside.

And if that's not enough, the State Department's own 2010 *Trafficking in Persons* report lists several West African countries where children are traded and taken to work on cocoa plantations.

All the while, the biggest chocolate companies cavil that because they don't own the cocoa plantations outright, cleaning up their supply chains is too hard. But some of them aren't even trying. The biggest cocoa company in the country, Hershey's—even after nine years—has no certification system in place whatsoever to ensure that its cocoa isn't tainted by labor rights abuses.

## Take Action

Here are some steps you can take on Valentine's Day to ensure that your chocolate isn't exploiting children overseas:

- Look for chocolate from companies that certify their supply chains via the Fair Trade Certified™ and the IMO Fair For Life label. See Green America's scorecard at right, which explains these labels in detail and ranks the companies.

- Contact conventional chocolate companies like Hershey's—call them, write to them, protest on their Facebook pages—and tell them you expect them to prove their supply chains aren't tainted.

- Contact your representatives in



## Labor Certifications


**Fair Trade Certified:** This label, from Fair Trade USA<sup>™</sup>, prohibits child labor, forced labor, and discrimination, and protects the freedom to organize. Farmers are guaranteed a Fair Trade floor price for cocoa beans, as well as a social premium. For a product to bear this label, 100 percent of the primary ingredient must be certified Fair Trade.

**IMO Fair for Life:** This Swiss label mandates the protection of human rights at all stages of production, preventing child and forced labor and ensuring safe working conditions for laborers. It ensures that suppliers earn an appropriate fair wage and a social premium. To bear the seal, all ingredients that can possibly be sourced from Fair Trade suppliers must be Fair Trade—amounting to at least 50 percent.

**Rainforest Alliance Certified:** Prohibits child and forced labor and discrimination. However, it does not protect the right to organize and does not require buyers to pay a minimum floor price to provide workers with a living wage. Only 30 percent of the primary ingredient needs to be certified to bear this label—the remaining 70 percent could come from farms that use child and forced labor.

**UTZ Certified:** Prohibits child and forced labor and discrimination, and protects the right to organize. However, the premium paid to farmers is negotiated between buyers and farmers, which is not so different from what goes on with conventional farms. Buyers do not have to pay the legal minimum wage in the first year of certification.

Congress. If after a decade the chocolate companies can't monitor their own supply chains, America needs to go back to the drawing board and demand, by law, that slave-produced chocolate must have no place on the shelves of US stores.

The people who produce the raw materials for our chocolate treats deserve fair wages and safe working conditions. Children shouldn't have to suffer unspeakable horrors so that our loved ones can have a happy Valentine's Day. 

—Andrew Korfhage

## Green America's Chocolate Scorecard

Ratings determined by policies in place to monitor and prevent child labor.

COMPANY/PRODUCT	GRADE	LABOR CERTIFICATION	BITESIZE CANDIES	SEASONAL SPECIALS/GIFTS
<b>Alter Eco</b> <sup>™</sup> altereco-usa.com	A			
<b>Coco-Zen</b> <sup>™</sup> Coco-zen.com	A		✓	✓
<b>Divine</b> <sup>™</sup> Divinechocolateusa.com	A		✓	✓
<b>Equal Exchange</b> <sup>™</sup> Equalexchange.coop	A		✓	
<b>Shaman</b> <sup>™</sup> Shamanchocolates.com	A			✓
<b>Sjaak's</b> <sup>™</sup> Sjaaks.com	A		✓	✓
<b>Sweet Earth Organic</b> <sup>™</sup> Sweetearthchocolates.com	A		✓	✓
<b>Theo Chocolate</b> <sup>™</sup> Theochocolate.com	A			✓
<b>Green &amp; Black's</b> "Maya Gold" Fair Trade Bar	A-			
<b>Dagoba Conacado Bar</b> Dagobachocolate.com	B			
<b>Green &amp; Black's</b> (all bars) Greenandblacks.com	B-	Moving to Fair Trade USA		
<b>Kraft</b> Kraftfoodscompany.com	D+		✓	
<b>Mars</b> Mars.com	D+		✓	
<b>Nestle</b> Nestle.com	D-		✓	
<b>Hershey</b> Hersheys.com	F	None	✓	

### TELL HERSHEY TO RAISE THE BAR

Every major chocolate company is adopting third-party certification for at least some of its cocoa to trace and eliminate the worst forms of worker abuse—but not the Hershey Co. Join Green America's Valentine's Day action to tell Hershey's to cut its ties to child slavery and worker exploitation. Learn more by reading our report, *Time to Raise the Bar*, at [RaiseTheBarHershey.org](http://RaiseTheBarHershey.org). Then, join us by signing our petition at [GreenAmerica.org/TakeAction/Hershey](http://GreenAmerica.org/TakeAction/Hershey), by hosting screenings of the film *The Dark Side of Chocolate* (order the film from us for \$6 at [GreenAmerica.org/go/MovieScreening](http://GreenAmerica.org/go/MovieScreening)), and by sending Valentine's cards to Hershey that ask them to "have a heart" for the people who grow their cocoa. (Find templates at [FairTradeAction.org](http://FairTradeAction.org).) Mail them to:

**The Hershey Company, Attn: David J. West, CEO,  
200 Crystal A Drive, Hershey, PA 17033-9783**