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Issue Response

**Conscious Consumerism and “Blood Chocolate”**

The article I read this week focused on the major issues within the chocolate industry. The article on the green news site “Tree Hugger” discusses a book written by Carol Off called *Bitter Chocolate*. This book and the article focus on the fact that children harvest much of the chocolate harvested in top-cocoa-producing African countries. An excerpt from Off’s book states that, “Children are kidnapped and sold across the border to harvest the beans, and yet through all this destruction and death, bags of cocoa beans keep showing up at port.” Here she is referring to the fact that civil war in many cocoa producing countries such as Liberia, the Ivory Coast, and Mali did little to harm the cocoa industry as producers turned to child slave labor. Major chocolate manufacturers avoid the issue by stating that they get their cocoa from agricultural conglomerates in order to absolve themselves from blame. The issue is buried under many layers of bureaucracy as all companies try to avoid responsibility for such practices. While in 2001 the members of the Chocolate Manufacturers Association signed the “Cocoa Protocol” and thus are supposed to be addressing the issue, numbers from a Tulane study make it seem doubtful that all that much action has been taken. According to this 2011 study, a “projected total of 819,921 children in Ivory Coast and 997,357 children in Ghana worked on cocoa related activities in 2007-2008.” However, these children cannot truly be called “workers” as they, “are in fact slaves who are imprisoned on farms, beaten for trying to leave, and denied any wages.”

The article finishes by offering options for consumers to avoid being part of this system. Fair Trade and Rainforest Alliance options and their pros and cons are discussed. I found this article extremely interesting as many Americans continue to make uninformed decisions as consumers and the hidden consequences of American’s various obsessions with things like chocolate, coffee, diamonds, and many others are rarely publicized. It draws into question many ethical factors about the responsibilities of both consumers and producers. It brings up interesting questions as well about who is to blame for allowing such cycles to continue and on who does the responsibility fall to demand changes.