

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chocolate from Children

By Deb Dunn

2013

*While many people enjoy chocolate as a tasty treat, few fully understand the work that goes into making chocolate, specifically the work done by children. In this informational text, Deb Dunn discusses the children in West African who pick the cocoa beans that chocolate is made from. As you read, take notes on the lives of the children who pick cocoa beans.*

- [1] Have you had some chocolate recently? Most Americans eat about 12 pounds of it each year! But many people don't know that children in West Africa pick most of the world's cocoa beans. (Cocoa is the main ingredient in chocolate.) People who buy chocolate are becoming more and more worried about child labor.<sup>1</sup>



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Imagine this. Ten-year-old Sametta lives in Cote d'Ivoire (or Ivory Coast), a country in West Africa. She wakes up at 4:00 a.m., eats millet porridge, and then walks two miles to her family's cocoa bean field. For the next 12 hours, she picks cocoa pods and then breaks them open. She scoops out the 30 to 50 seeds, or "beans," that are inside the pods. (About 400 beans are needed to make one pound of chocolate.) Sametta does not have time to go to school. Her family needs her to work in order for them to survive. Her health is also at risk. The cocoa pods are sprayed with poisonous pesticides.<sup>2</sup> She also uses a knife with a long, sharp blade when she works.

This is not a story from long ago. This is happening right now. Every day in Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon, about 300,000 children pick cocoa beans that will be sold to big chocolate companies. Most of the children work on their families' farms. They need to sell every bean to make money for their families to survive. School is out of the question. Worse, about 6,000 of these children are slaves. They sleep in dirty rooms, work 12-hour days without pay, are fed very little, and are sometimes whipped.

Why is this happening? The reason is money. Extremely poor countries send children to work in other countries where cocoa beans grow. In exchange, their government is paid. Also, families who own the cocoa bean farms are very poor. They depend on growing and selling cocoa beans to survive. Without help from their children, the farmers would not be able to buy food. Big chocolate companies pay farmers a very low price for their cocoa beans. Most farmers earn only between \$30 and \$100 a year — total.

- [5] In 2001, the U.S. government created an international agreement with major chocolate companies. It said that chocolate companies should help eliminate child slavery and child labor by July 2005. So far, however, the agreement has not ended child slavery and child labor.

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1. the illegal work that children take part in  
2. chemicals used to kill insects that are harmful to plants

Still, there is hope, as organizations around the world work to eliminate child labor. For example, a group of farms in Africa and South America are called Fair Trade Certified. Companies that buy cocoa beans from these farmers sign an agreement. They promise to pay the farmers a Fair Trade price. This is enough for them to buy food and clothing for their families and send their children to school. There are about 45,000 farmers in this program. Any chocolate made from these farmers' beans is labeled Fair Trade.

The Rainforest Alliance is also working to improve life for farmers, teaching them ways to protect soils, waterways, and wildlife while increasing their yields,<sup>3</sup> ensuring that their children go to school and eliminating child labor. Farms that meet strict standards designed to protect the environment and ensure the well-being of farm families, workers, and their communities can earn the Rainforest Alliance Certified seal.

You can help eliminate child labor too by looking for the Rainforest Alliance's green frog seal and the FairTrade trustmark when you shop for chocolate.

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