CST Conscious Consumer: Chocolate

Introduction to CST Conscious Consumer
The world is consuming goods and services at an unsustainable pace, with serious consequences for the well-being of people and the planet. At the same time, however, growing dissatisfaction with current consumption trends has led consumer advocates, economists, policymakers, and environmentalists to develop creative options for meeting people’s needs while dampening the environmental and social costs of mass consumption.

The Education for Justice Web Site invites you to join us as we unmask the negative face of consumerism and explore a variety of consumption options that promote a more just world.

PRAYER
O God, we confess to you that we have sinned.

In our lust for lifeless objects
and our relentless pursuit for more,
we have crossed the line to idolatry.
We seek salvation in spiritless things,
worship you for our own gratification,
and see ourselves and each other
as mere consumers and commodities.

Forgive us, O God, for we have sinned.
In your mercy, raise us from the dead.
Breathe new life into us, your people.
Empower us to be a prophetic community,
living the gospel of Jesus.
Create in us a consuming passion
to love and serve you.
Amen.

REFLECTION
Consequently, the promotion of justice
is at the heart of a true culture of solidarity.
It is not just a question of giving one’s surplus
to those in need,
but helping entire peoples
presently excluded or marginalized
to enter into the sphere of economic & human development.

For this to happen,
it is not enough to draw on the surplus goods
which in fact our world abundantly produces;
it requires above all a change of lifestyles,
of models of production and consumption,
and of the established structures of power
which today govern societies.

Pope John Paul II, 2001 World Day of Peace Message

CST Conscious Consumer
This unit explores the global issues behind our chocolate purchases. Topics covered include child labor, slavery, corporate concentration and impoverished small farmers, the environment and Fair Trade Chocolate. Included are prayers and reflection, fact sheets, a case study, suggestions for action and discussion questions.
Activities

1. Begin this session with the prayer and reflection on page 1.

2. Ask group members to call out the associations—words, concepts, images, etc.—that they have with chocolate. List these associations on the newsprint. Display the newsprint for the rest of this session.

3. Have participants divide into small groups. Copy and distribute the fact sheet on page 3. After the small groups have read over the fact sheet, have them discuss the following questions:

   - How are the issues of poverty and education related to each other in the lives of cocoa farmers and their families?
   - What is the relationship between slavery and poverty?
   - What keeps cocoa farmers in this vicious cycle of poverty?

4. Copy and distribute the fact sheet on page 4. After the small groups have read over the fact sheet, have them discuss the following questions:

   - Greater and greater concentration of market power in the hands of fewer, larger companies means that a relatively small number of people are making decisions that effect millions of others. Catholic Social Teaching states that democratic participation in decision making is the best way to respect the dignity and liberty of people. How does corporate concentration in the food system undermine democracy, human dignity and freedom?
   - How might the price decisions of a handful of cocoa processing corporations negatively effect the development of entire communities? How might these decisions effect national economies?

   Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes the transformation of unjust structures and systems? What are some of the challenges to transforming the global food system to benefit people throughout the world?

   How can you become a more conscientious consumer and a more aware citizen in order to bring about positive changes in the food system? (Be specific and give examples.)

5. Reconvene all participants into one large group. Copy and distribute the case study on page 5. Have participants read the case study out loud. Bring the participants attention back to the newsprint on which you have written their associations with chocolate. Discuss the following questions:

   - How might your association with the word "chocolate" differ from that of Aly?
   - What kind of life awaits those children who are forced into slavery on cocoa farms?
   - Are you able to imagine a way in which they might overcome some of the difficulties in their lives?
   - How can we help these children?

6. Copy and distribute “Global Exchange and Fair Trade Chocolate” on page 6. After participants have read the sheet, discuss some concrete actions that the group can take together to make a difference in the lives of cocoa farmers and their families. Commit to taking one action together. (You may want to give participants time to go to the Global Exchange Web Site to learn more before making a final decision.)

7. End the session with the prayer on page 1.
Fact Sheet: If you knew the origin of your chocolate, it probably wouldn’t taste so sweet.

- America is the world's largest chocolate consumer. In 2000, the U.S. imported 729,000 tons of cocoa beans and processed products, ate 3.3 billion pounds of chocolate, and spent $13 billion on it.
- The six largest cocoa producing countries are the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil and Cameroon.
- 90% of the world's cocoa is grown on small family farms of 12 acres or less.
- West Africa has been the center of world cocoa cultivation for the last sixty years, today producing over 67% of the world’s crop. Ivory Coast is the giant in world production—it now holds 43% of the market.

The Poverty of Small Cocoa Farmers
- 90% of the world’s cocoa is grown on small family farms of 12 acres or less. These growers face extreme poverty and are unable to meet their basic needs.

- An August 2002 International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) report revealed that average annual earnings from cocoa farming range from $30 to $110 per member of household.

- Mana Osei Yawu III, Chief of Niveneso Village in Ghana has said, “We had no water in the village, we just had dirty water from rivers and streams. People spent a lot of time collecting water and there was always someone who was sick. The money we used to get from selling our cocoa beans to the government didn’t give us enough to buy materials or a pump for our own water supply.”

- These facts were clearly stated in the August 2002 IITA report: “Interviews with community leaders indicated that the greater employment of family labor was a common response to the recent drop in cocoa prices and the crisis in cocoa incomes. The net effect . . . is reduced household investments in children’s education.”

- These small farmers and their children remained trapped in a cycle of poverty, without hope for sufficient income or access to basic education or health care. Thus, poverty is a major factor contributor to slave labor.

Child Laborers
- In 2001, The U.S. State Department and the International Labor Organization (ILO) reported child slavery in the Ivory Coast. The child slaves come from countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Togo — nations that are even more destitute than the impoverished Ivory Coast.

- Parents in these countries unknowingly give their children to traffickers believing that they will find honest work once they arrive in Ivory Coast and then send their earnings home. But as soon as they are separated from their families, the young boys are made to work for nothing.

- According to the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), 284,000 children (both children of cocoa farmers and slaves) are working on cocoa farms in hazardous tasks such as using machetes and applying pesticides and insecticides without the necessary protective equipment.

- Whether used as slaves or paid, children working on cocoa farms are not likely to be going to school as other children their age. The IITA report noted that only 34% of children working on cocoa farms in the Ivory Coast were attending school, while 64% of those not working on cocoa farms were in school. Essentially, one’s chances of getting an education are cut in half when they come to work on a cocoa farm. The IITA study also reported that 64% of children on cocoa farms were under the age of 14, meaning that the loss of an education comes at an early age for the majority of children on cocoa farms.

Cocoa Industry Information Sources: UNICEF; IITA; “How your Chocolate May be Tainted,” Knight Ridder News Service, By Sumana Chatterjee and Sudarsan Raghavan, June 25, 2001; Global Exchange; Food, Inc. Corporate concentration from farm to consumer, UK Food Group, Bill Vorley
Fact Sheet: Corporate Concentration Contributes to Poverty of Small Cocoa Farmers

The Global Situation
Severe poverty, child labor, and the reemergence of child slavery can be blamed, in part, by raw cocoa prices that are too low to provide farmers with enough income to meet their production costs, much less their basic needs. Producer countries, led by the Ivory Coast, are pressuring for manufacturers to pay more, saying that it is the only way to prevent poverty-stricken cocoa farmers from using forced labor.

• A World Bank Report (Morisset, 1997) estimated that gap between producer prices and consumer prices may have cost commodity-exporting countries (such as those that export cocoa beans) more than $100 billion a year.

• According to the European Fair Trade Association, farmers get barely 5 percent of the profit from chocolate, whereas trading organization and the chocolate industry receive about 70 percent. This means that producers get only 5 cents from every dollar spent on chocolate, while the companies get 70 cents—14 times more!

There is an accelerating trend around the world toward concentration of market power in the hands of fewer, larger companies. Especially in food production today, this is true among transnational agro-food companies, which control the way food is produced and how it is distributed, according to their goal of maximum profit. As corporate control increases at each stage of the food production chain, independent farmers and consumers become ever more vulnerable to the economic might of these companies.

Cocoa processing is fairly concentrated, with four companies (Cargill, ADM, Barry Callebaut and HOSTA) controlling around 40% of cocoa grinding. Their 9% control of the global market is big enough to provide price leadership, while small cocoa beans farmers have no say in the matter. In other words, these four companies are setting the low price of cocoa; as their profits skyrocket, cocoa farmers toil in poverty.

The burden of Debt owed to international institutions (the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) has left small farmers in an even weaker position, placing them at the mercy of the volatile world market, without any supports or safety nets (border measures, price supports, production subsidies and access to credit), which are often forbidden according to the terms of their loans.

The Situation in the United States
For years, US chocolate manufacturers have said they are not responsible for the conditions on cocoa plantations since they don’t own them. But the $13 billion chocolate industry is heavily consolidated, with just two firms—Hershey’s and M&M/Mars—controlling two-thirds of the U.S. chocolate candy market. This means that if these global corporations really wanted to reform problems in the supply chain, they have the power and the ability to do so.

In 2001, the chocolate industry finally stopped denying responsibility for the problems in West Africa after a string of media exposés and the threat of government action jeopardized their image and business-as-usual. In November 2001, the U.S. chocolate industry announced, in a Joint Statement with the International Union of Foodworkers, the International Labor Organization (ILO), Free the Slaves, and the Child Labor Coalition, to establish a joint foundation to oversee and sustain efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor (see ILO Convention 182) and forced labor (see ILO Convention 29) in the growing and processing of cocoa beans and their derivative products.

However, this plan does not address the basic issue of prices for small farmers. Without such a guarantee, there is now way to ensure that child slavery and poverty are brought to an end for good.

A poor man’s field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away.

Proverbs 13:23

Educate Yourself
Learn more about the role of agribusiness in the global food system. Visit the following web sites for more information:


Case Study: Child Slaves on Cocoa Bean Farms

Aly Diabate was almost 12 when a slave trader promised him a bicycle and $150 a year to help support his poor parents in Mali. He was then placed on a farm and worked for a year and a half for a cocoa farmer who is known as “Le Gros” (the Big Man), but he said his only rewards were the rare days when Le Gros’ overseers or older slaves didn’t flog him with a bicycle chain or branches from a cacao tree. Aly said he doesn’t know what the beans from the cacao tree taste like after they’ve been processed and blended with sugar, milk and other ingredients. He has never tasted chocolate.

Aly Diabate and 18 other boys labored on Le Gros’ 494-acre farm, very large by Ivory Coast standards, in the south western part of the country. Their days began when the sun rose, which at this time of year in Ivory Coast is a few minutes after 6 a.m., and they finished work at about 6:30 p.m. They trudged home to a dinner of burned bananas. If they were lucky, they were treated to yams seasoned with saltwater “gravy.” After dinner, the boys were ordered into a 24-by-20- foot room, where they slept on wooden planks without mattresses. The only window was covered with hardened mud except for a baseball-size hole to let some air in. “Once we entered the room, nobody was allowed to go out,” said Mamadou Traore, a thin, frail youth with serious brown eyes who is 19 now. “Le Gros gave us cans to urinate in. He locked the door and kept the key.”

“We thought we had been sold by the trader, but we weren’t sure.” The boys became sure one day when Le Gros said, “I bought each of you for 25,000 francs (about $35), so you have to work harder to reimburse me.” At night, Aly had nightmares about working forever in the fields, about dying and nobody noticing. To drown these thoughts out, he replayed his memories of growing up in Mali, over and over again. “I was always thinking about my parents and how I could get back to my country,” he said. But he didn’t think about trying to escape. “I was afraid,” he said, his voice as faint as the scars on his skinny body. “I had seen others who tried to escape. When they tried they were severely beaten.”

Finally one boy successfully escaped and told elders in the local village what was happening, police freed the boys and sent them back to their villages in Mali. Le Gros was charged with assault against children and suppressing the liberty of people. But such abuses continue on other farms, but large and small farms alike.

Source: “How your Chocolate May be Tainted,” Knight Ridder News Service, By Sumana Chatterjee and Sudarsan Raghavan, June 25, 2001
Global Exchange is an international human rights organization dedicated to promoting political, social and environmental justice globally. The organization promotes Fair Trade Chocolate as a way to correct the economic imbalances of the cocoa system.

Fair Trade is an international system of monitoring and certification to guarantee that poor producers are paid a fair price for their harvests. Monitoring agencies from importing countries collaborate with diverse networks of cooperatives from producing countries to create a humane trading system that benefits people and the environment. The Fair Trade system guarantees that farmers receive at least $.80/pound (or $150 per metric ton above the world price if the world price rises above $.80/pound), giving them the stable and sufficient income they need to support their families with dignity. Fair Trade prohibits abusive child labor and forced labor.

Although Fair Trade criteria do not mandate organic and shade grown methods, several aspects of the Fair Trade system support sustainable production and farmers are actively encouraged to seek organic certification. Fair Trade criteria ban certain pesticides and require the use of integrated crop management, where organic methods of pest/disease control and fertilization are emphasized over chemical ones. Fair Trade cooperatives are also required to set aside revenues for technical workshops, which often address the benefits and proper use of sustainable techniques and thus promote their increased use.

All farms are monitored once per year to ensure that all conditions are met.

Global Exchange’s cocoa campaign is focused on building support for Fair Trade chocolate among consumers and retailers, and pressuring large companies like Mars, Inc. (maker of M&M’s, Snickers, and Milky Way) to take immediate steps to end child slavery and poverty wages by committing to purchase at least five percent of their cocoa as Fair Trade Certified.

Visit the Global Exchange Web Site, www.globalexchange.org, for more information on Fair Trade Chocolate. There web site has excellent resources including a downloadable booklet entitled, “Fair Trade Chocolate Campaign: A How-To Guide that Shows what you Can do to Promote Fair Trade for Cocoa Farmers.” This booklet contains fact sheets, background information, steps to organizing a Fair Trade Chocolate campaign, sample letters to store managers, steps to switching school/organization fundraisers to fair trade chocolate, steps to passing a fair trade purchasing resolution in your city, county and/or college, steps to organizing an educational event, and tips for writing effective letters to the editor.

As a consumer, you vote with the dollars you spend on one product over another. The more you learn about the consequences of your purchasing choices, the more you can use your buying power to reward companies that are socially and environmentally responsible.

The next time you entertain, try to serve a dessert made with only chocolate that is fair-trade certified. Explain to your guests why you chose this type of chocolate and encourage them to reevaluate their own chocolate choices.

-a tip from the WorldWatch Institute