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Could I Have a Human Trafficking Footprint?

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Shortly after being born we imprint our birth certificates with our first footprints, tiny feet that throughout our lives will leave a footprint on our global community. In response to climate change we become aware of our carbon footprint. When faced with the fact that 1.1 billion people do not have access to clean water we begin to calculate our water footprint. In our efforts to be responsible consumers we can ask ourselves, “Do I have a human trafficking footprint?”

Clothing

When I put on my shirt this morning did I wonder where the cotton was grown and harvested? Could it have been Uzbekistan, the third largest exporter of cotton in the world? Did I know that every autumn the government orders that schools be closed and

that hundreds of thousands of students and their teachers go to the fields to pick cotton for two months? Here the children, some of whom are as young as seven, are exposed to pesticides, inadequately housed, suffer injuries and are punished for not picking their quotas. What can I do about this trafficking of children?

While most clothing labels indicate the country in which the product was made, very few indicate where the cotton was grown. Since 2007 the Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment has been a member of a coalition of shareholders

working with retailers to condemn the use of forced child labor and to refuse to sell products containing Uzbek cotton. Individuals can join this effort by reading *Slave Nation: State Sponsored Forced Child Labour in Uzbekistan's Cotton Fields* and then by asking companies to insure that what they sell is clearly labeled with the country of origin of the cotton fiber.

Produce

What do my food choices tell me about my human trafficking footprint? Perhaps I already look for the Fair Trade label guaranteeing that the grower of my coffee was paid a fair price. But what about the human trafficking footprint of the low-cost produce I search for in the weekly ads? Do I consider the farm workers and the

conditions of their employment?

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), a community-based organization working to eliminate modern-day slavery conditions from Florida agriculture, focuses its efforts on the major food-buying corporations. Its first victory was with Taco Bell, a campaign of several years that



Boys forced to work in Uzbekistan cotton field.

resulted in the company agreeing to improve the wages and working conditions for Florida tomato pickers. This gave the CIW the

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impetus to persuade fast-food companies McDonalds, Burger King, and Subway to sign the “Fair Food Agreement.” Whole Foods was the first company in the supermarket industry to agree to work with the CIW, and this April the food service giant Aramark signed the agreement.

Individuals can work in partnership with the CIW by joining the Alliance for Fair Food to advocate for socially responsible purchasing in the corporate food industry.

DEMANDING SLAVE-FREE CHOCOLATE

Kit Kat

Next time chocolate lovers in the United Kingdom and Ireland take a bite out of a Kit Kat bar, they can be assured that it was produced without slave labor. The decision by Nestle UK to seek fair trade certification for Kit Kat bars followed years of pressure from consumers. “UK consumers are increasingly interested in how we source and manufacture their favorite products,” said Nestle managing director David Rennie. Moving to fair trade is “one of the ways in which we are committing to improving the lives of as many cocoa farming families as possible.” There will be no increase in cost for the fair trade Kit Kat bars in the UK. Ask the big 3 American chocolate companies to go slave free at <http://tiny.cc/bigchocolate>.

On the local level consumers can reduce their footprint by buying local, seasonal food directly from farmers through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) or farmers' markets.

Chocolate

We are delighted to read the news that "Dark Chocolate is Healthy Chocolate." But what about the other headline, "The Dark Side of Chocolate?" Behind that headline are the faces of a million children employed in dangerous and abusive conditions in the West African cocoa farming sector. An estimated 200,000 to 800,000 children are trafficked there each year.

In 2001, Representative Eliot

Engel and Senator Tom Harkin responded to reports about the abuse of children in cocoa farming by introducing legislation to require a "no child slavery" label on chocolate products sold in the U.S. Instead, the chocolate industry agreed to the Harkin-Engel Protocol, which committed them to develop and implement certification standards to guarantee that their cocoa beans are grown and processed without child labor.

Almost 10 years later, just as we were enjoying our chocolate Easter eggs, BBC aired *Chocolate: The Bitter Truth*. A reporter, posing as a cocoa dealer, found evidence of child trafficking and labor in the cocoa supply chain in West Africa. Since assessments continue

to indicate that not enough progress has been made on eliminating child labor, is it time to acknowledge that the Protocol is a failure and label the chocolate?

Now is the time to move Hershey, Mars and Nestle beyond the "no child slavery" label to the Fair Trade label which supports the livelihoods of farmers and the well-being of children. We can all write to the chocolate manufacturers and tell them, like this 8th grade student at St. Anthony School: "*I absolutely love all the products that your company produces but my hatred of slavery outweighs it. I know how wrong it is and I'm prepared to stop purchasing any product that was produced by a slave.*" ~