

# It's a hard fight to end child labor abuse on West Africa's cocoa farms

By McClatchy-Tribune, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.18.13

Word Count **683**

Level **760L**



Children living in a cocoa producing village walk back from the fields carrying wood and food stuff on their heads on the outskirts of the town of Oume, Ivory Coast, on June 30, 2005. The message has traveled down red earth roads to tropical forests where green, fist-sized cocoa pods hang low from lush trees: 'Stop child labor on cocoa plantations or the world may stop buying your cocoa.' AP/Schalk van Zuydam

WASHINGTON — There could be no chocolate without cocoa. And without companies like Cargill Inc., Americans would not be able to get this important ingredient. Cargill is a huge trader and producer of foods like grain, meat and cocoa. It has operations all over the world.

Cocoa makes most kids happy, at least when they eat it as chocolate. But cocoa has a dark side too. Much of the cocoa crop is grown on farms where children work. The work is dangerous and keeps the children from a bright future.

Big cocoa companies like Cargill are trying to stop child labor abuses on cocoa farms. But, they also want to keep production high. Cocoa is a valuable crop. It sells for a high price and there are more and more buyers.

Government and news reports have described abuses in the cocoa industry. Kids have been forced to drop out of school. Some have even been kidnapped and made to work without pay. These

reports have been around for more than a decade.

### **Cargill's "Cocoa Promise"**

There have been many attempts to cure child labor issues. But they have not worked. Children continue to work on cocoa farms, some in unsafe conditions.

Cargill says child labor abuses can be fixed. It believes if farmers can learn better ways of growing more cocoa on their land, they will earn more money. They will not depend so much on cheap workers. Then farmers and governments might decide it is better to send children to school.

Cargill wrote a plan called the "Cocoa Promise" in November. It named "protecting children's rights" as one of its top goals.

Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa believes cocoa companies must do more. Archer Daniels Midland, Mars, Nestle and Hershey are also big cocoa players. In 2001, Harkin made an agreement to put pressure on cocoa and chocolate companies. It is called the Harkin-Engel Protocol.

Progress has been made in fighting child labor since the protocol. "But, it has not come quickly enough," Harkin said.

### **A Difficult Problem To Fix**

In 2010, the cocoa companies offered \$10 million to fix the problem.

But the child labor problem is big. More money is needed, Harkin said. He said companies linked to major chocolate brands have helped. But, the companies that process cocoa, such as Cargill and ADM, have been less active, he said.

Archer Daniels Midland is a giant farming company. ADM said it works to stop the worst forms of child labor.

Cargill is leading the child labor fight, said Taco Terheijden. He works for Cargill. Terheijden said the company spent \$5 million in the past three years in Ivory Coast and Ghana.

But progress will be slow, Terheijden said. Cargill's wants to help communities "so they can take control of their own future."

About 70 percent of cocoa comes from West Africa. Ivory Coast and Ghana are big producers. Roughly 1.8 million children work on cocoa farms in those two countries.

### **Watching Child Labor in West Africa**

Companies like Cargill buy cocoa from farmers. Then they process it. Cargill trades cocoa and sells some processed cocoa to chocolate makers. But it's also a major producer itself.

The child labor abuse became known around 2000. News reports about cocoa made people notice the problem.

Some children work on the cocoa farms helping out their parents, just as some American kids do. But some young cocoa workers have been separated from their families. They are taken from nearby countries and sent to Ivory Coast. There, they are then forced to work.

Farm labor can get in the way of a child's schooling. It's also plain dangerous. Kids may have to spray chemicals or use sharp machetes.

Tulane University has been watching child labor in Ivory Coast and Ghana. It published a report about its findings. The report said cocoa companies have failed to meet one major goal: setting rules that would certify if cocoa is free of the worst form of child labor.

That way, kids could enjoy their chocolate bars knowing no other children had to suffer for it.

## Quiz

- 1 What is the main idea of the article?
- (A) Most cocoa comes from West African countries.
  - (B) Children working on cocoa farms need to get paid more money.
  - (C) People should eat less chocolate to protect child workers.
  - (D) Cocoa companies need to do more to keep child workers safe.
- 2 Which detail is LEAST important to the main idea of the article?
- (A) Cocoa makes most kids happy, at least when they eat it as chocolate.
  - (B) There have been many attempts to cure child labor issues.
  - (C) But the child labor problem is big. More money is needed, Harkin said.
  - (D) But some young cocoa workers have been separated from their families.
- 3 What is another good title for this article?
- (A) Making more jobs on cocoa farms
  - (B) Senators say stop buying chocolate
  - (C) Cocoa companies fire child workers
  - (D) The dark side of the chocolate business
- 4 Which paragraph best sums up the main idea in the section "A Difficult Problem to Fix"?

## Answer Key

1 What is the main idea of the article?

- (A) Most cocoa comes from West African countries.
- (B) Children working on cocoa farms need to get paid more money.
- (C) People should eat less chocolate to protect child workers.
- (D) Cocoa companies need to do more to keep child workers safe.**

2 Which detail is LEAST important to the main idea of the article?

- (A) Cocoa makes most kids happy, at least when they eat it as chocolate.**
- (B) There have been many attempts to cure child labor issues.
- (C) But the child labor problem is big. More money is needed, Harkin said.
- (D) But some young cocoa workers have been separated from their families.

3 What is another good title for this article?

- (A) Making more jobs on cocoa farms
- (B) Senators say stop buying chocolate
- (C) Cocoa companies fire child workers
- (D) The dark side of the chocolate business**

4 Which paragraph best sums up the main idea in the section "A Difficult Problem to Fix"?

**Paragraph 10:**

**But the child labor problem is big. More money is needed, Harkin said. He said companies linked to major chocolate brands have helped. But, the companies that process cocoa, such as Cargill and ADM, have been less active, he said.**