

Serious costs are borne by laborers in industries with little regulation or oversight, such as the chocolate industry. Seventy-five per cent of all chocolate the world eats begins as raw cacao in West Africa. The West African cacao industry relies on half a million underage workers to produce the cacao bean. In Ivory Coast alone, 200,000 children work under conditions that UNICEF refers to as “slave labor,” many of those children trafficked from other countries (UNICEF 2007). According to a study done by Tulane University in 2009, up to 70 per cent of the workforce in Ivory Coast consists of children under 14 years of age. Only 2 to 6 per cent of those children report being paid for their labor. Many of them are forced to work up to 100 hours a week, suffer physical abuse, and never return home to their parents. Ironically, the vast majority of cacao farmers have never seen or tasted chocolate in its final form.

Anthropologist Amanda Berlan (2008) did her fieldwork among Ghanaian cacao farmers. In contrast to the Tulane study group above, her informants are participants in the **Fair Trade** system. Farming for companies committed to the Fair Trade model ensures a fair price for the product, supports ethical business and environmental

practices, and provides financial support to farmers. In her field setting, she did not uncover child labor or a collapsing social structure. Berlan found that these cacao farmers were active participants in decision-making regarding their farming practices and compensation. These two contrasting examples underscore the importance of examining each issue in its local context, something that is fundamental to the process of doing anthropology.

Companies seeking to provide an ethically sound product may seek out anthropologists to help them develop it. This is the case for Askinoisie Chocolate, an artisan chocolate company who sought the assistance of anthropologist Jeanine Gasco from CSU Dominguez Hills. Working as a collaborative team, Gasco, cacao farmers in Soconusco, Chiapas, Mexico, and the founders of Askinoisie Chocolate developed strategies to produce higher quality cacao (Harmon 2010). The result of the collaboration was Askinoisie’s purchase of six tons of cacao in 2007 to produce a single-origin Soconusco chocolate bar. This example illustrates the benefits to companies of having an anthropologist on the team when seeking to work directly with food producers.