The Chocolate Revolution: The Meaning Behind The Movement And Ethically Certified Labels

Objective(s)

One of the objectives of this research paper is to discuss the reasons for the movement working to establish ethical standards for chocolate production and consumption, as well as its impact and goals. The last objective is to create a greater understanding of the labels one must navigate when attempting to make an ethical chocolate purchase.

Summary of Findings

Introduction

In response to the increase in globalization and industrialization our world seems to experience each day, a movement was born to place restraints on the exploitation that has occurred as a result. The movement is strongest within the food production and consumption industries, which is evident in the current obsession with food labeled as “fair trade,” “organic,” “local,” and various others with differing degrees of meaning. Chocolate is no exception to these labels. Because chocolate is a food item that is not a required part of the human diet, those who consume it have the means to choose what kind of chocolate they eat. The “Chocolate Revolution” is the coined term for the movement to consume chocolate that has been produced ethically. Sales in this premium chocolate have soared since the early 2000s, increasing by 200% from 2003 to 2006.

In this paper, I hope to create a better understanding of the labels of Fair Trade, Organic, and Sustainable, as they relate to chocolate. I will discuss the reasons behind the chocolate revolution and the goals of the movement. I will conclude with suggestions for improvement within both the movement itself and the research surrounding it. I will use the term premium chocolate to refer to chocolate labeled with any type of label referring to its fair trade, organic, local, or sustainably grown status.
The Chocolate Revolution

Chocolate is a unique food item in that it is not an essential part of the human diet, yet has become a symbol of love, care, and luxury in cultures across the globe. Those who choose to buy chocolate, therefore, have the means to choose its type and quality, as it is an unnecessary expense. This special characteristic is at the root of what commentators call the “Chocolate Revolution,” or the movement to consume chocolate that is of an ethical standard. The chocolate revolution can be considered a part of the greater food movement that is pushing for greater oversight in food production.

The largest ethical concerns for chocolate production are addressed in the two smaller movements that make up the larger chocolate revolution. The fair trade movement concerns itself with the working conditions of the producers of chocolate, while the organic and sustainably grown chocolate movement is focused on environmental protection policies. The working conditions and labor issues surrounding chocolate production are discussed in Carin Postal’s “Labor Issues and Politics of Cocoa Production and Cultivation.” These two movements coexist peacefully, with fair trade foundations promoting environment friendly practices and organic/sustainable organizations requiring higher standards of working conditions.

Fair Trade

Fair trade products are the fastest growing segment of the global food market, with total sales reaching $1.6 billion annually (Raynolds 3). Over five million farmers, farm workers, and their families across 58 countries have joined the fair trade movement. This ever growing popularity is due to the concern that globalization continues to exploit the people and environment of developing nations. Large food corporations are competing in the “race to the bottom,” attempting to find areas with the lowest cost of human and environmental input (Raynolds 6). The fair trade movement is unique in that it targets these corporations directly by appealing to consumers’ consciences, rather than attempting to change trade laws within a nation’s government.

The fair trade movement has been present since the end of World War II, when church groups began helping devastated areas strengthen their economies by selling their handicrafts and food products at a higher price. In the 1960s, the movement reassessed their goals and determined that it would concern itself with combating the injustice of the poor by focusing on the production of tea, coffee, and cacao. At the same time, Alternative Trade Organizations (ATOs) began to emerge, which defined themselves as “operating under a different set of values and objectives than traditional trade, putting people and their well-being and preservation of natural environment before the pursuit of profit” (Renard, et al.). Each ATO had a different label signifying their individual meaning of fair trade, which led to competition within a small market that had very similar goals. The need to unify the fair trade movement was obvious, which...
resulted in the creation of the Fair Trade Labeling Organization International (FLO), whose headquarters are in Germany.

There are currently fourteen sister organizations in Europe, the United States, Canada, and Japan, all of whom follow FLO criteria for deciding which products qualify as fair trade (Renard, et al.). Twenty-one different labeling initiatives in twenty-two countries as well as producer networks in developing countries jointly own FLO (FLO website). FLO is responsible for certifying all of the producers in developing countries, while either FLO or the local labeling initiative can certify the products being sold outside of the producer country. A summary of FLO standards is as follows:

- Ensure a guaranteed Fairtrade minimum price which is agreed with producers
- Provide an additional Fairtrade premium which can be invested in projects that enhance social, economic and environmental development
- Enable pre-financing for producers who require it
- Emphasize the idea of partnership between trade partners
- Facilitate mutually beneficial long-term trading relationships
- Set clear minimum and progressive criteria to ensure that the conditions for the production and trade of a product are socially and economically fair and environmentally responsible.

(Source: http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/fairtrade_certification_and_the_fairtrade_mark/fairtrade_standards.aspx)

FLO standards are the minimum requirement for the labeling initiatives in various countries. In the United States, Fairtrade USA is responsible for the labeling of coffee and chocolate. The specific label it uses can be found in Appendix A. Fairtrade USA There are other fair trade labeling initiatives in the US, yet they are not required to follow FLO standards, thus looking for this specific label is the safest guarantee that the product is actually fair trade certified. Fairtrade USA also implements additional standards, along with those required by FLO. Its requirements are not remarkably different from FLO, though it does place more emphasis on empowering the producers through methods such as education and training. A full list of Fairtrade USA’s standard can be found in Appendix B.

In regard to the future of fair trade chocolate, the movement hopes to continue recruiting producers in developing countries. One of the challenges that it is facing is that there is a high demand for fair trade certified goods, yet the movement is committed to working with small-scale producers. Including more small-scale chocolate producers will help meet the demand of consumers while also spreading the benefits of fair trade throughout the developing world (Raynolds 12). Another challenge is that leaders of the fair trade movement hold two contradicting visions for the future of the movement. One vision is that fair trade could be used
as a tool to change the world-dominating economic model completely so that it puts the well-being of the environment and producer before prices. The less radical vision is that fair trade will continue to insert products from the South under fair conditions in the markets of the North, without making any larger changes to the market (Renard). It is likely that the movement will have to choose one of these visions to follow in the future. However, the popularity of the movement is increasing each day, so we can expect it to maintain a large presence in our food markets.

**Organic and Sustainably Grown Chocolate**

The choice to buy organic and sustainably grown chocolate is rooted in the consumer’s desire to conserve and protect the environment, rather than the working conditions of the producer farms as we saw in the fair trade movement. The world is facing alarming rates of tropical forest loss and because so much of our chocolate is produced in rainforest areas, implementing environmentally safe standards for chocolate production will have a large effect on the future of the rainforests (Cohen). Organic chocolate is included in this section because the choice to buy organic chocolate has more to do with the treatment of the environment in chocolate production, rather than the consumer’s health. Buying conventional chocolate does not have the same meaning as conventional meat and dairy products, because the chemicals used in chocolate production have not been scientifically proven to have negative effects on human health. Chocolate producers also do not use the synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and irradiation that we so often see in other crop productions. Standards for organic chocolate do include that pesticides and other chemicals cannot be used on cacao pods, yet the majority of the standards are concerned with protecting the environment. In the United States, the USDA is in charge of the certification of organic chocolate. According to the USDA, organic requirements include that “Operations must demonstrate that they are protecting natural resources, conserving biodiversity and using only approved substances. Organic crops cannot use irradiation, sewage sludge, synthetic fertilizers, prohibited pesticides, and genetically modified organisms” (USDA website).

The USDA organic label also certifies that at least 95% of the product contains organic content. If you want to buy organic chocolate, look for the USDA Certified Organic label (see Appendix C). Other organic labels do not have to follow the same standards.

One of the goals of this movement is to encourage consumption to be geared towards chocolate produced with eco-friendly production technologies. Another important goal is to limit the size of cacao farms, because small to medium sized farms (less than forty acres) are both more productive and more efficient than larger corporate holdings (Cohen). As of now, however, we rely on large producer farms for our chocolate to meet the increased demand. In Malaysia, 85% of its chocolate production comes from holdings greater than forty acres. These large corporate holdings often use harmful environmental practices because they cannot effectively produce enough chocolate otherwise.
Conclusion

The chocolate revolution continues to strengthen and expand across the globe. The concern for the way in which chocolate is produced is not going away, which is clearly evident in the increasing sales of premium chocolate. It will be interesting to see the direction the movement takes in the near future. Currently, it has made a conscious decision to avoid the political channels surrounding the food industry by appealing directly to the consumer and therefore pressuring corporate suppliers of chocolate. However, there are strong voices within the movement that want it to become more political because they believe there is a need for major changes in economic policy and trade laws. I hope that the movement takes a stronger political stand because I believe that it has the support and vision that could positively affect the way economic policy is approached.

The research available related to the chocolate revolution is severely limited due to its relatively recent influence on the chocolate market. Much of the research concerning fair trade, organic, and sustainable growth practices focuses on coffee, with information about chocolate thrown in random places. Due to its growing popularity, I hope that more research will be conducted on the chocolate producers themselves, and not just the Western organizations working to standardize ethical chocolate production

Appendix

Appendix A

Source: skagitfoodcoop.wordpress.com
Appendix B

Principles:
Fair Trade Standards

Fair Trade USA’s standards will allow the many different producers of agricultural commodities to participate and compete in international markets in ways that are fair and equitable today and help them to progress and acquire greater business capacity over time.

| Empowerment | Inclusive Participation and Transparency
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<td>Empowerment can take many forms such as farmers joined together in cooperatives or workers on large farms joined together in workers’ associations. In all cases, Fair Trade USA standards require democratic and transparent decision making.</td>
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|              | Premium Management
|              | Groups of farmers and workers are empowered to determine how to spend community development premiums in the ways that best meet the needs of their communities. |
|              | Focus on training and capacity building
|              | Fair Trade USA standards require training in areas such as workplace safety freedom of association, freedom from discrimination, financial management, pricing and international market mechanisms. |

| Economic Development | Stable business partnerships
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<td>Fair Trade contracts are honored so that stable trade relationships can develop and small producer organizations are better able to commercialize their products.</td>
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|                      | Pre-determined Premiums
|                      | Fair Trade USA standards require pre-determined community development premiums for every sale. |
|                      | Pricing and Wages
|                      | Fair Trade guarantees minimum prices in some commodities and focuses on increasing wage levels for workers. |

| Social Responsibility | Fair Trade prohibits child labor, ensures health and safety measures are established in order to avoid work-related injuries and follows International Labor Conventions (ILO). Workers are guaranteed access to healthcare and community development premiums can be used to provide greater access to quality of healthcare and education. |

| Environmental Stewardship | For Fair Trade Certified products, the most toxic chemicals are not used and there are no GMOs. Fair Trade organizations develop a strategic approach to integrated pest management, the safe use and handling of agrochemicals, responsible waste management, protection of soil and water and biodiversity, and reduction of energy and greenhouse gas emissions. |

Fair Trade standards also establish a foundation for transparent reporting through which businesses and consumers can be assured that Fair Trade prices and premiums for community development are paid to farmers and workers. Each year, Fair Trade USA publishes a broad array of impact documentation that can be viewed or downloaded at www.FairTradeUSA.org.

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Source: fairtradeusa.org
Appendix C

Source: thedailygreen.com
Sources


