

Whole Foods Drops Hershey's Scharffen Berger Chocolates Over Child Labor Abuses

Whole Foods Market (NYSE: WFM) locations around the country will be removing one of Hershey's high end products-- Scharffen Berger chocolate-- from shelves across the country by the end of the year due to Hershey's failure to assure that the cocoa is sourced without the use of forced child labor.

Whole Foods' decision to remove Scharffen Berger comes in response to more than 15,000 customers demanding that the natural foods grocer hold Hershey accountable for exploiting children for profit. Whole Foods' decision follows more than 40 natural food retailers and coops publicly expressing concern about carrying Scharffen Berger and Dagoba products as a consequence of the giant chocolate maker's refusal to address child labor in its supply chain.

In a letter to the Raise the Bar Hershey coalition, Whole Foods stated: "We do not take the concern over child labor or slave labor lightly, and we are currently in ongoing conversations with Hershey's about its existing social accountability programs ... Whole Foods Market is removing Scharffen Berger chocolate from our shelves pending receiving further information from Hershey's."

"We thank Whole Foods for taking the important step of dropping Hershey's Scharffen Berger chocolates," said Alisa Gravitz, President and CEO of Green America. "The decision to cut Scharffen Berger shows that Whole Foods knows Hershey's isn't committed to eliminating child labor from their products."

However, the Raise the Bar Hershey campaign is disappointed that Whole Foods will continue to offer Dagoba products.

"Now, Whole Foods needs to drop Dagoba bars to strengthen the message that none of their products will be on Whole Foods' shelves as long as Hershey is earning profits at the expense of child laborers," says Kirsten Moller, co-founder of Global Exchange. Even if Dagoba is Rainforest Alliance certified, the coalition argues that Hershey's overall lack of commitment to ethical sourcing means they should be shut out of high end, certified chocolate sales until they change their approach to cocoa overall.

According to a U.S. government-funded study, over 1.8 million children work in West Africa's cocoa industry. Many of these children are exposed to dangerous working conditions and some are even trafficked and sold off to perform grueling labor. Hershey, and other major chocolate companies, source the majority of their cocoa from West Africa. Several major chocolate makers, including Mars and Ferrero, have agreed to make a major commitment to sourcing ethical chocolate but Hershey's -- the maker of Dagoba and Scharffen Berger - refuses to budge.

A coalition of groups including the Teamsters, Organic Consumer's Association, Green America, International Labor Rights Forum, Global Exchange and other supporters are urging

Whole Foods to take a stand on principal to refuse to sell any of Hershey's individual products until the chocolate giant makes a major commitment to sourcing ethical cocoa.

"Socially conscious consumers shouldn't be surprised that Whole Foods is willing to sell products from suppliers that are tainted by child labor," said Judy Gearhart, Executive Director of the International Labor Rights Forum. "More than once, Whole Foods has turned a blind eye to the rogue conduct of its suppliers. For example, right now Whole Foods is refusing to hold its primary supplier UNFI, accountable for workers' rights violations at its distribution center in Seattle."

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GLOBAL EXCHANGE is a membership-based international human rights organization dedicated to promoting social, economic and environmental justice around the world. www.GlobalExchange.org

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