

# African farms are crucial to cocoa chain

BY CATHERINE L. ALSTON  
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Pennsylvania has made its mark on chocolate production in the United States through the years, with several major chocolate manufacturing and processing companies making significant contributions to economic development in the state and beyond.

But many chocolate lovers don't realize that the primary ingredient of every chocolate bar — cocoa — comes from small family farms (five acres or less) in West Africa.

Nearly 70 percent of the world's cocoa supply originates there.

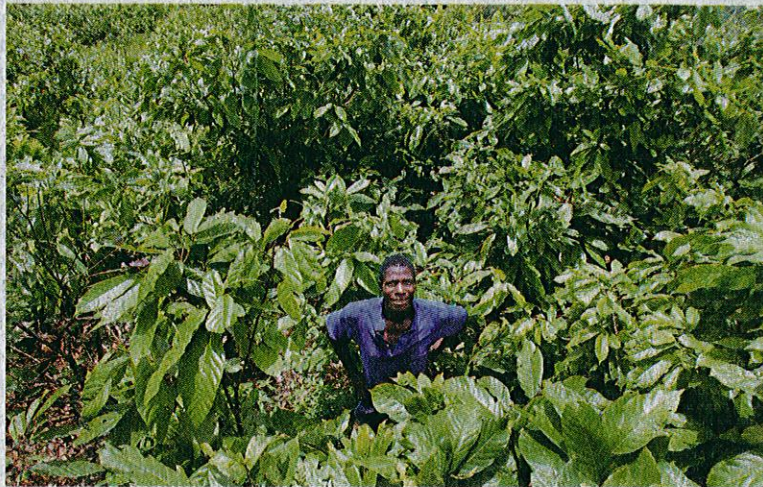
These independent farmers are the first link in the cocoa value chain, which ends with your favorite chocolate candy.

In West African countries, cocoa farmers are in a perpetual struggle to protect their valuable crops from pests and diseases that reduce the health and production level of the trees.

Some 16 million people in West Africa depend on the cocoa crop as their main source of income.

And when farmers find evidence of disease, they know that it could have a dramatic impact on their families' livelihood.

The cocoa swollen shoot disease, for example, can be found throughout West Africa. It attacks cocoa leaves and shoots and can kill the tree within two years.



The Associated Press

An African cocoa farmer stands amid his crop of cocoa trees in the western Ivory Coast.



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In Ghana alone, more than 32 million cocoa trees had to be destroyed from 2001 to 2004, and each year the rates of infections are increasing.

It's not surprising, therefore, that national governments, cocoa companies and international organizations such as the World Cocoa Foundation and the International Institute of Tropical Ag-

riculture are working together to ensure a robust production of good quality cocoa by supporting and managing programs that encourage sustainable cocoa-growing and improve the lives and livelihoods of these cocoa-producing communities.

WCF and member companies,

Please see **COCOA** on Back Page

## COCOA

Continued from Page C1

(including several operating in Pennsylvania — Archer Daniel Midland Co., Barry Callebaut, the Blommer Chocolate Co., The Hershey Co. and Mars Inc.) are supporting the Sustainable Tree Crops Program.

This innovative program aims to improve the economic and social well-being of tree crop farmers and their ecosystems using a newly developed set of technology transfer, marketing and institutional training tools.

One of the many crop programs supported by WCF is the Farmer Field School methodology, where farmers gain hands-on training on proper production, pest and disease management and post-harvest techniques.

Graduates of the Farmer Field School who properly apply the integrated crop and pest management lessons can expect greater cocoa yields.

Andrew Ukhuegbe of Nigeria, for example, increased his revenue by 620 percent over four years.

"I pursued my farming

with passion, courage and determination," said Ukhuegbe, who is teaching other cocoa farmers these valuable techniques as a Farmer Field School facilitator.

Through collaborative efforts, progress is being made to ensure that cocoa will continue to be a viable cash crop.

With funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and 15 of WCF's member companies, the Cocoa Livelihoods Program will continue the successful approach of the Farmer Field School and include innovative activities to support farmers by encouraging them to diversify crop production.

This will help increase food security, improve incomes and further support sustainable cocoa crops.

About 200,000 cocoa-farming households in the region are expected to benefit from this program.

Initiatives such as these that help small farmers boost their cocoa yields and improve their lives have an impact all the way through the cocoa value chain, ending with chocolate companies and consumers right here in Pennsylvania.