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Food | Responsible Chocolate, Anyone?

By [Jill Santopietro](#)



(Lars Klove for The New York Times)

On Wednesday I wrote an [article](#) in The New York Times about [Kallari](#), a group of indigenous Ecuadorean cacao farmers and self-taught chocolate makers, whose bars are now sold at [Whole Foods](#) markets across the country. Kallari's story is a rare one in the history of chocolate, a history that has been dominated by conquerors and industrialized countries.

I was curious about how Kallari's bar would stand up to the other organic, [Fair Trade](#) or [Rainforest Alliance](#) bars on the Whole Foods shelves. I admit I've always been skeptical of organic chocolate. In my experience, most of it tastes awful. Organic certification of chocolate is different than organic certification of local produce, or at least this was the case three years ago, when as a part-time job, I was handing out samples of a high-end, non-organic-chocolate bar at Whole Foods stores around Manhattan.

A lot of small-batch cacao farmers do not have the money for organic certification. Yet they also can't afford chemicals and fertilizers, meaning their products are organic anyway, only without the official designation. So when the customers turned away from my sample chocolates and reached instead for a bar of terrible organic chocolate, I was disheartened. We, the consumers, are always looking for a label so that we don't have to do the research ourselves for the stories behind our food. "Organic" and "Fair Trade" just so happen to be the latest.

I brought the chocolates listed below to **Chanterelle** restaurant in Manhattan for a side-by-side tasting with the pastry chef, **Kate Zuckerman**, who has a palate I trust. Such tests are the only way to know how good a product really is. You hear about wine tastings all the time, but few chefs and consumers sample chocolate this way. It's so eye-opening that I strongly recommend trying it.

Buy bars of the same or similar cacao percentage. If your tasting includes milk and dark chocolates, start with the dark and move toward the sweet. Put a piece in your mouth, let it melt slightly on your tongue, and then swoosh it around. Cleanse your palate between tastings with water or bread. And don't forget to take notes. For more feedback, do it with a group and taste blind if you can.

Below are my notes from our chocolate tasting. Perhaps I was a bit biased. But try it for yourself.

* poor
** satisfactory
*** good

Theo 75 percent cacao, Fair Trade, single-source chocolate made from Ivory Coast beans: acidic, bland, astringent (drying) finish, not worth the calories. Suggestion: chop and toss into cookie dough. *

Kallari 75 percent cacao, organic, Rainforest Alliance, single-source but bean blended Ecuadorean chocolate: fruity, dried cherries, vanilla, smooth, cacao finish. Suggestion: serve it as is at the end of a dinner party. ***

Endangered Species 70 percent cacao, organic chocolate: sugary, moldy taste, had to spit it out. Suggestion: perhaps it was just a bad batch. But if dogs could eat chocolate, I would have given it to the dog. *

Chocolove 73 percent cacao, organic chocolate: not smooth, dried cherry, astringent. Suggestion: keep it in your purse for one of those unpredictable and desperate cravings. **

Dagoba 73 percent cacao, Fair Trade, organic, single-source cacao made from Conacado beans: moldy taste, astringent, acidic, over-roasted beans, not smooth. Suggestion: give it to your next-door neighbor who eats everything. *

Vintage Plantation 75 percent cacao, Rainforest Alliance, made from Ecuadorean beans: some fruitiness, cacao flavor, slightly dry finish. Not bad. Suggestion: make brownies with it. **

Equal Exchange 71 percent cacao, Fair Trade, organic chocolate made from Peruvian and Dominican beans: so much vanilla it almost overpowers all the cacao flavor, the finish is cacao, a little sweet, but not offensive. Suggestion: more cookies, anyone? **

Green and Black's 70 percent cacao, organic chocolate: not much going on other than cacao flavor, a little moldy tasting, astringent. Suggestion: put it out on the giveaway pile for the office mooch. *