

It's easy to be bamboozled by swanky packaging and #druol-worthy flavour combinations when you're selecting a block of chocolate. You want something delicious, rich and melt-in-your-mouth creamy, and – if you're anything like me when you're in the mood for chocolate – you want it now. Standing in front of the veritable wall of choccie products in the supermarket, the same resolve you had just minutes ago while selecting the fresh, locally grown produce has (momentarily) dissolved, and those blocks of Lindt Salted Caramel on special for \$2.99 are looking pretty good.

But there is just one problem with tossing any old block of choc into your trolley, and that is that the chocolate industry is fraught with ethical shortcomings.

Although Lindt and Sprungli, as well as Cadbury, Nestle and the rest, have their initiatives towards sustainability – be it alignment with fair trade associations, sustainable farming projects, or reducing greenhouse gas emissions – they shouldn't be on the top of your list when it comes to ethical choccie consumption. In fact, many have been given a big fat 'F' by the Ethical Consumer Group guide (guide.ethical.org.au), which translates to 'criticisms' based on company records. According to the guide, the chocolate industry is or has been guilty of using child labour and unsustainable palm oil pesticides that are banned in the US, EU and in Australia. The simple solution to the latter, at least, they say is choosing organic chocolate.

### The organic difference

Recent research by Australian Certified Organic found that the decision to buy organic products often comes from a desire to eat healthier, avoid any unnecessary chemicals and additives and have a reduced impact on the environment. While all this may seem a lot more tangible when you think of your lettuce leaves being sprayed with pesticide or your carrots growing in artificially fertilised soil than when you're noshing on Dairy

Milk in front of the telly, choosing organic chocolate is just as important. "The main difference is that organic chocolate is made using the most natural ingredients and without the use of artificial additives, pesticides and chemicals," says Deb Singleton of Organic Times (organictimes.com.au), an Australian-owned company that sells organic chocolates, cookies and baking products. "You may notice that organic chocolate usually lists a smaller amount of ingredients." Their organic, fair-trade 55 per cent dark chocolate contains only five ingredients: cocoa mass, rapadura sugar, cristallino cane sugar, cocoa butter and soya lecithin – all of which are certified organic.

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### Strictly certified

"In order for our products to bear the NASAA certified mark, all the ingredients used in the production of our organic chocolate are organically grown and certified," Singleton says. "Only packaging is not required to be certified organic; however, as we have a strong belief in sustainability, we ensure our packaging is made using recycled board in Australia."

NASAA is an Australian and international organic certifier that ensures that certified companies such as Organic Times comply with strict organic standards across the board (harvesting, storage, handling, processing and marketing according to their 2012 fact sheet).

"Basically, NASAA has a set of rules and regulations, which is called Organic Standards. This is a handbook for operating under certification, including labelling requirements, list of prohibited products, and so on," says Singleton.

### Organic Times

Our good friends over at Organic Times make wonderful couverture (translation: extra creamy, extra-high quality and extra delicious) chocolate-coated fruit and nuts, as well as cookies and Gems, their all natural version of Smarties.



**NASAA certified and Australian owned.**

Dark Chocolate Macadamia Nuts, 150 g, RRP \$12.95, for stockists see [organictimes.com.au](http://organictimes.com.au)

### Alter Eco

One of the Ethical Consumer Group guide's most highly praised chocs, Alter Eco uses organic Peruvian cocoa to create some seriously wicked flavours, such as Dark Coconut Toffee and Dark Salted Brown Butter. Many of their products contain less than 10 ingredients and they're also certified gluten free.



**USDA certified organic.** Dark Coconut Toffee bar, 80 g, \$3.99 at [shop.alterecofoods.com](http://shop.alterecofoods.com)

### Conscious Chocolate

Touted as the 'original raw, vegan chocolate', Conscious Chocolate is something of a pioneer. Gluten, dairy and soy free, low GI and available in biodegradable and compostable packaging, we now have many, many more reasons to scoff a block.



**Organic Farmers & Growers certified.** Coconut Crunch, 50 g, RRP \$6.99, for stockists visit [kadac.com.au](http://kadac.com.au)