

## We can encourage businesses to do the right thing



**BARB GUY**

When Chris and I visited a rugmaker's gallery in Morocco in 1995, we were enchanted by the rich colors, the gorgeous patterns, the acrid smells, the foreignness of the entire experience.

The refined salesman, fluent in English, Spanish and Arabic, could convert prices into a dozen different currencies in his head. He showed us increasingly smaller rugs as the reality of our meager budget became clear to him.

At one point he mentioned that young children worked in his factory. He said it as though it were the hallmark of sophistication, adding, "Children's hands make the smallest, finest knots."

Creeped out at the thought of little children missing school, hunched over their grubby bare

feet, blistering tiny fingers to make carpets for the tourist trade, Chris and I almost left. Then the salesman showed us a small piece he said was about 100 years old.

Did this render the rug, even if it, too, was made by children, innocent due to its antiquity? In 1895, education was a long way from guaranteed to all kids in the United States, so how could we expect any more of Morocco?

Chris and I will never know the truth about our rug. Did the salesman, seeing our concern, present us with a carpet - and a story - that we could live with? Under the circumstances, it's not surprising we don't love the rug. Yet our dollars of approval went to the rugmaker.

Now I try to pay attention when I'm uncomfortable about a purchase. That's what's behind World Fair Trade Day, Saturday, May 10 ([www.wftday.org](http://www.wftday.org)). This annual effort by a global network of 300 free trade organizations is intended to teach consumers about the power of our currency to reward or to punish.

Where we direct our money matters a great deal; we can encourage businesses that are using humane practices. On the other hand, we can withhold our cash from those whose focus falls too fully onto the financial

side while not showing enough compassion for people or planet.

We buy more and more local goods at our house, but adhering entirely to local production would keep us away from products we're not willing to live without. Like bananas, for one. And handmade crafts from other cultures, for another.

Two-thirds of the people on Earth live on less than a dollar a day. The rest of us throw dollars out the window, figuratively, every day, even in our new-found tough economic times. These thrown-out dollars don't make their way to the world's poor people; they often line the pockets of practitioners of unethical, unsustainable business practices.

Fair Trade means worrying about gender equity, working conditions, child labor, the environment, trade relations, the payment of a fair price and creating opportunities for economically disadvantaged producers. If you don't have time to take all this on, you can shop with people who do.

Ten Thousand Villages (founded by kindly Mennonite church people and with shops in Salt Lake City and Logan) and Global Exchange ([www.gxonlinestore.org](http://www.gxonlinestore.org)) both have Free Trade Mother's Day gifts. Also, a few products in

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many local stores bear certification of sustainability or fair trade practice; we need only start looking and requesting.

For caring people, World Fair Trade Day is a reminder that we can direct our purchasing power to help the little fingers of the world use pencils, chalk and toys, leaving jobs like making rugs for the hands of adults - adults who work in safe conditions and receive a fair wage.

If that's the message our Moroccan rug was meant to teach us, then I guess it was worth it, although Chris and I only paid a fraction of its cost, if you know what I mean.

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*BARB GUY is a regular contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.*