Folks have been getting more interested in the foods they eat. Slow food, organics and natural are heard much more often today than they used to be. Food in general is going through a renaissance and chocolate is no different. Part of the chocolate renaissance is that people are realizing that chocolate — regular, good old, chocolate — has many faces.

Different flavors abound. Making chocolate bars from cocoa beans grown in one particular country or region (known as origins) has helped fuel this trend. People are realizing that chocolate tastes different depending on where it’s grown: Africa, Indian Ocean, East and West Indies, Central America and South America, to name a few places. Origins have really been the seed of education for the consumer.

You may ask: Why are consumers now interested in origins? Where were they 10 years ago? Was there a diversity of flavor already in the marketplace? Perhaps, but the majority of differences were so small that the consumer really couldn’t taste the difference. Many manufacturers moved towards a wider use of bulk beans or forastero beans.

The chocolate world is competitive and we all want to make the best products at the best prices. Maybe some cocoa was not available, which does happen. But if you were to look back at formulations that made companies famous you might see a drift towards the use of more forastero today than in the past. It is a drift that’s been going on for a few hundred years. It wasn’t just a change started by those wacky chocolate manufactures. This really has been an extension of chocolate’s evolution since explorers discovered cocoa in the Western world and attempted to corral it. It seems to have been a natural progression, and reminds us of the fragile nature of cocoa.

We’ll take a look at the historical nature of this drift. The question remains whether we’ve reached the end of one chocolate era and the beginning of another. This process of incremental degradation has put both consumers and processors to sleep for the last 40 to 50 years. But today we may be awakening from our slumber. The alarm clock went off, we yawned, stretched and bit into a Scharffen Berger bar. “Wow, what’s this?” The flavors of anise and cherry vanilla go off like a

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**Cocoa Bean Types and Characteristics**

*Cocoa has evolved over its 4,000-year history to give us the flavors we know today, but the best is yet to come.*

**Gary Guittard**
Guittard Chocolate Company

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Gary Guittard joined his family’s 140-year-old chocolate business in 1975, and became president in 1989; now he is president and CEO. He is a member of the Chocolate Council, a member of the association’s scientific group and a founding member of the World Cocoa Foundation.