

## A Dead End Summer for Tomatoes

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This year Georgia farmers and related businesses suffered a \$25 million loss due to a public health advisory regarding tomatoes issued by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

In June 2008 the federal government suspected that several varieties of tomatoes carried the virulent Saintpaul strain of salmonella. Many restaurants dumped their supplies of tomatoes, and many consumers shunned them. The average price for a box of tomatoes plummeted from \$20 a box to \$5 a box with many boxes being sent straight to the garbage.

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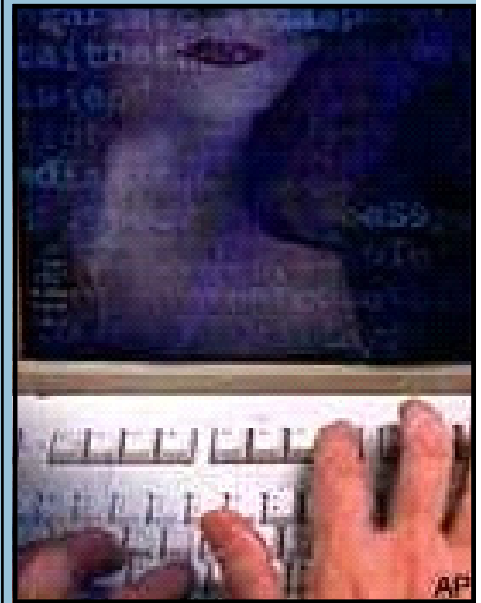


## Child Prostitution in Georgia

By: Rachel Moore  
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The past several decades have been mostly prosperous times for Georgia and its capital city. As home to the world's busiest airport, Atlanta has become one of the most popular convention destinations in the U.S. and has seen significant economic growth thanks, at least in part, to its status as a major transportation hub. Unfortunately, Atlanta has also become the hub for something much more sinister: the commercial sexual exploitation of minors. The FBI ranks Atlanta as one of the top 14 cities in the U.S. for incidents of child prostitution.

In response, the Georgia General Assembly has set out this year to examine the problem of child prostitution and related crimes. The Commercial Exploitation of Minors Joint Study Commission is co-chaired by Sen. Renee Unterman and Rep. Calvin Hill and includes among its membership House and Senate members along with representatives of the judicial and law enforcement communities.



Given the underground nature of this type of activity, firm statistics are hard to come by. However, experts estimate that as many as 200 to 300 young girls are sexually exploited in Georgia every month. The Juvenile Justice Fund's statewide campaign, *A Future. Not A Past*, has begun a multiyear tracking study of commercial sexual exploitation of adolescent girls to gain a clearer understanding of the problem. Recently released findings of this study paint a sobering picture of scores of minors participating in various sectors of the sex trade. Researchers monitoring corridors and hotels in

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the Atlanta area known for prostitution activity found an average of 40 to 90 girls every month engaging in street prostitution and approximately 25 girls with johns at hotels. Moreover, an examination of Georgia's escort services identified an average of 50 to 100 underage females each month. The study also examines the prominent role the internet now plays in prostitution; researchers found that approximately 100 to 115 girls are made available through Craigslist.org ads each month. The statistics established by this tracking study do not tell the complete story of child prostitution in Georgia; for example, the researchers did not monitor street or hotel activity outside of the Atlanta area and the study does not include sexual exploitation of boys. Nonetheless, the numbers that have emerged so far show a problem too big to ignore. On a typical weekend night, more girls, 129, are commercially sexually exploited in Georgia than the number killed in car accidents, 58, in an entire year.

Despite these troubling numbers, the attention paid to the prostitution of minors has often paled in comparison to other criminal activities. Part of the problem may be popular perceptions of prostitution in general. As Stephanie Davis of the Atlanta Mayor's Office noted at the Commission's first meeting, prostitution is commonly referred to as a "victimless crime." This premise is undermined, however, by the preva-

lence of minors in the sex industry. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the average age of entrance into prostitution and the pornography business is 12 to 14 years old. Complicating matters is the difficulty in determining the exact age of sex workers. According to the Juvenile Justice Fund's tracking study, the men seeking the services of underage prostitutes are not typically engaging in pedophilia, as most of the girls involved are in their teenage years and are mature at least in a physical sense. Even though many johns may not purposely seek



out a minor, there is clearly a very strong demand for prostitutes who come close to that legal line. A survey of Craigslist postings found that ads touting the youthfulness of their subjects with lines such as "just turned 18" or "barely legal" received 132 percent to 175 percent more inquiries than other ads.

In many respects, Georgia already has strong laws for prosecuting cases of child sexual exploitation. Although the offenses of pimping, pandering, or keeping a place of prostitution are normally aggravated misdemeanors, the Child Sexual Commerce Prevention Act of 2001 increased the penalties for these offenses when involving the prostitution of a person under 18; today, these crimes are felonies punishable by five to 20 years imprisonment and fines of \$2,500 to \$10,000. In spite of these strong measures, some advocates argue that current law leaves room for ambiguity on how minors involved in prostitution should be handled by law enforcement. While the age of consent for sexual activity is 16 under current state law, Georgia, like all states except Michigan, has no minimum age for the offense of prostitution. Thus, while the law in many cases regards child prostitutes as victims, there is still the possibility that they may be treated as criminals themselves. According to data from the Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice, there were at least 21 actions against minors on prostitution charges in 2006. Some jurisdictions such as Fulton County have adopted a policy of not prosecuting children on prostitution charges; even in such places, however, there is no guarantee that minors will not be arrested and detained, even if the charges are soon dropped.

To remedy this inconsistency,

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Unfortunately, the number of cases of salmonella skyrocketed to over 1,300, while tests seeking salmonella on tomatoes all turned out negative. For several weeks the FDA was unable to track down what caused the outbreak because there is no nationwide system to trace food from field to fork. Investigators were slowed by hours of sifting through batches of paper records at multiple facilities that handle packing and distribution. It got even more complicated because tomatoes from different farms are routinely mixed together for shipping to markets.

Disease detectives were unable to find a single contaminated tomato, though they did find the outbreak strain on one jalapeño pepper in a south Texas produce warehouse. New Mexico's \$500 million pepper crop took a big hit as the FDA tried to track down the origin of the pepper for over a week. Ultimately, only jalapeño peppers grown in Mexico were implicated in the nationwide salmonella outbreak.

Georgia began testing in response to the FDA's blanket recommendation that consumers avoid all fresh jalapeños and products that contain them. On July 25, 2008, in response to a finding that Georgia jalapeños were safe, the Commissioner of Agriculture Tommy Irvin stated, "FDA unfairly condemned innocent farmers and food processors that produce safe and healthy



food. That is not right. Many farms have not even begun harvesting; yet they are being forced to suffer. Putting American farmers out of business does not make our food supply safer."

### The Georgia Solution

According to Gary W. Black, President of the Georgia Agribusiness Council, prevention of this kind of unnecessary hardship and illness is possible through better traceability of food products. Mr. Black states that, "Warnings from public health and food regulation officials based on 'maybe' and 'probably' wreak havoc with consumer confidence and economic stability in the market place...traceability is an important part of our nation's food safety strategy."

Currently, the carrier of information about fruits and vegetables in America is the tiny sticker called the P.L.U., for "price look-up." Four-digit numbers denote conventionally grown produce; five digits beginning with a 9 denote or-

ganic; and five digits beginning with 8 denote genetically modified. A conventionally grown ear of corn, for example, may be marked 4078; an organic one, 94078; and a genetically modified one, 84078. The numbers can also vary with the size of the fruit: 3069 indicates a small Gravenstein apple and 3070 indicates a large one.

The stickers are unpopular with consumers as well as with the produce industry because they hold little information and are not durable. "If they are sticky enough to stay on the fruit through the whole distribution and sales network, they are so sticky that the customer can't get them off," said Michael Hively, General Manager of Bland Farms in Reidsville, Ga., the country's largest grower and packer of sweet Vidalia onions. Many times these stickers fall off during transport or become damaged from moisture.

New laser identification technology developed by Georgia entrepreneurs at LaGrange-

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based Durand-Wayland, Inc. offers part of the solution to the problems surrounding food traceability. A patented application of laser technology facilitates printing on produce with precise control and without degradation to the product. An amount of emitted light removes the pigment layer from the surface of the produce to reveal a contrasting sub-layer. Because this removal process has been designed not to penetrate the surface or “skin” of the produce, it does not promote decay.

The Product Look-up Code (PLU), Country of Origin Labeling (COOL), Grower Lot Numbers and any other requested security information can be marked with this process. Not only is each piece of produce permanently coded, but specific information can be stored electronically for any period of time. The laser light printing process is earth-friendly by using no consumables to label the produce. Other direct benefits include being an all natural

process that never has contact with the produce. The laser etching can stay with the produce from field to the preparation table.

According to Robert L. Collins, President of Durand-Wayland, a formal petition to FDA for commercial use of the product was filed in early 2007 and published in the Federal Register in April 2007. Since then Durand-Wayland received some feedback and engaged in numerous conversations with the FDA, but is still caught up in a maze of regulations concerning lasers that were implemented in the 1950’s. Although the laser used for labeling food emits less radiation than a microwave or a surgical laser, the archaic FDA guidelines concerning radiation are causing difficulty. On October 1, 2008 Durand-Wayland requested approval for partial use of the product on produce with non-edible skins. Durand-Wayland hopes to hear favorable news in the near future so that production and sales of the laser etching can begin in LaGrange.

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Emory’s Barton Child Law & Policy Clinic and others have proposed amending Georgia’s statutes for prostitution and masturbation for hire to include a minimum age. Kirsten Widner of the Barton Clinic, and author of a recent treatise on child prostitution in Georgia, testified before the Commission that such a change would put Georgia in line with federal and international law, both of which regard underage prostitutes as victims entitled to protection and appropriate services. Another reform recommended by the Barton Clinic includes a revision of Georgia’s mandatory child abuse reporting law to increase the identification of victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

In addition to studying possible legal reforms, the Commission is also examining the current state of care for victims of child commercial sexual exploitation and ways to expand services. Child prostitutes often come from distressing situations that precede their involvement with prostitution. Experts cite early sexual abuse as one of the most common risk factors for sexual exploitation. On top of this troubled background is the trauma of the sexual exploitation itself. Pimps routinely use violence, drugs, and other abusive tactics to coerce vulnerable minors into prostitution. The dangerous work of prostitution also puts these minors at acute risk for violence and degradation at the hands of their johns, sexually transmitted diseases, and unplanned pregnancies. Because of these factors, advocates say

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specialized services for the unique needs of victims of commercial sexual exploitation are critical. After undergoing repeated trauma, these minors often develop a hardened persona that can make it difficult for counselors not specially trained to work with them. Moreover, after being manipulated into a strong sense of loyalty to their exploiters, many of these children have a tendency to return to the streets unless they are closely monitored.

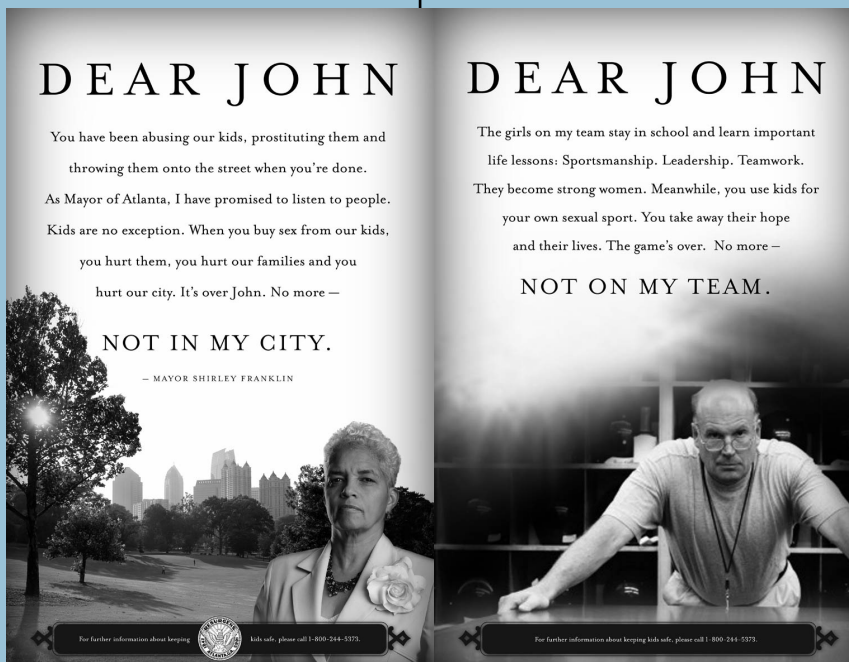
While current options for services are limited, activists are seeking to expand services tailored to the needs of minors seeking to exit a life of prostitution. Georgia is home to one of the nation's few residential treatment facilities for girls who have been commercially sexually exploited. Angela's House provides female victims between the ages of 13 and 17 with psychiatric and medical treatment, individual and group counseling, and educational



opportunities specifically designed to help them recover. However, Angela's House only has six beds, and the facility cannot provide treatment to girls with an IQ under 75 or who have severe mental health disorders. Victims who are unable to receive treatment in a specialized program such as Angela's House might find services in other facilities or group homes. According to many mental health experts, however, treatment in a non-specialized service can be problematic, as survivors of child prostitution are often subject to ridicule and shunning

when placed with other young people who have not experienced similar trauma. Despite the urgent need for more specialized care, securing funding for the expansion of services is no easy matter in this tough economic climate. The FY 2009 budget passed by the General Assembly this year included \$560,000 for a regional assessment center for child victims of prostitution and trafficking, but this allotment has since been frozen due to the state's budget crisis.

Thanks to the work of a wide spectrum of advocates, including non-profits, faith-based groups, and government officials, this silent epidemic is finally getting the attention it deserves. Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin has been particularly active in shining a spotlight on child sexual exploitation, launching the "Dear John" campaign in 2006 to educate the public. While significant strides have been made in recent years in terms of public awareness, much more education and resources are needed before Georgia can end this heartbreaking problem once and for all.



These are images of published materials from the "Dear John" campaign.