

PALM OIL FACTSHEET

WHAT IS PALM OIL?

Palm oil is an edible oil that comes from the fruit of oil palm trees (*Elaeis guineensis*). It is a highly versatile oil, used as an ingredient in many foods, cosmetics and cleaning products that you find in your supermarket.

The following items found in your supermarket may contain palm oil:



HOW DO I KNOW IF THE THINGS I'M BUYING HAVE PALM OIL IN THEM?

You probably don't. There are many many names for palm oil, including strange words like Sodium Dodecyl Sulphate, numbers like 430 and 470, and even the simple term VEGETABLE OIL (that's right, even vegetable oil could be palm oil).

IS THIS IMPORTANT? HOW MUCH PALM OIL DO WE EVEN USE?

The amount of palm oil that we are using has grown and grown, and globally we now use about 50 million tonnes per year. This figure is expected to grow by another 50% by 2050 (that's a lot of palm oil!). The reason we are now using so much palm oil is that it is a pretty good crop to grow because:

- Palm oil is a very efficient crop, producing up to ten times more output per hectare than alternative vegetable oils. In other words, if we were to use oil from other crops we would require ten times the amount of land that palm oil uses
- The recent boom in palm oil exports from producing countries has seen much needed economic growth and job creation in many relatively poor regions

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BUT... THERE ARE SOME PROBLEMS

This growing global demand for palm oil has driven development of vast plantations on key growing countries in South East Asia, as well as in emerging areas of production, such as West Africa and Latin America.

While the communities and countries growing palm oil have benefited economically from the growth in palm oil consumption, the environmental and social impacts of this growth have been devastating, including:

- Destruction of habitats of critically endangered wildlife species, such as orang-utans and tigers
- The release of vast amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere
- The displacement of some local forest-dwelling communities who are forced to leave homes and regions they have lived in for many years

So should we just stop buying things with palm oil in them? Wouldn't that stop rainforests being cleared and help to protect animals and their habitats, help stop climate change, and look after the people living in rainforests?

Well, no. Boycotting (which in this case means protesting against palm oil by NOT buying the products containing palm oil) is not the answer. Boycotting palm oil products may lead to the following:

- Local producers suffering from loss of income
- Other companies buying the palm oil at a cheaper price which means local people make less money and palm oil will continue to be produced
- Growing other crops for their oil will result in more land being cleared
- Low incentive for companies to buy sustainable palm oil



Oil palm kernels



Palm plantation

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SUSTAINABLE PALM OIL

However, there is a push for more sustainable methods of palm oil production. By applying stringent social and environmental standards at all stages of palm oil cultivation and processing, palm oil companies can continue to grow without harming rainforests or forest-dependent communities.

WWF is working to promote the transition to Certified Sustainable Palm Oil (CSPO) that conserves forests, protects species, and secures livelihoods by:

- Supporting the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) - an international group of palm oil producers, palm oil buyers, and environmental and social groups working to define, implement and promote better practices for sustainable palm oil production
- Encouraging companies to use only CSPO in all the products they make and sell - CSPO is oil that comes from plantations that have been independently certified as meeting the standards of the RSPO

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

There are several things you can do:

1. Firstly, look for the RSPO and CSPO labels on the things that you buy and support producers who use sustainable palm oil by buying their products (see logo on right)
2. Write a letter to the ones who aren't using sustainable palm oil yet, and encourage them to get on board. Some tips for writing a letter like this include:
 - Be polite and friendly (you don't want to scare them off!)
 - Be concise (keep it short)
 - Stick to the facts (have a look at [WWF's website](#) for more facts)
 - Stay positive (suggest positive things that the company can do)
 - Proofread (check it over before you send it off)
3. Tell everyone you know about what you've learned and encourage them to do their own research and look for RSPO or CSPO companies.



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