



PALM OIL AND THE RAINFORESTS

LEARNING GOALS

- To understand the pros and cons of palm oil production.
- To think critically about the impact of sustainable industry associations, standards, and labeling.
- To practice drawing connections between local challenges and global contexts and best practices.

ASSIGNMENT

Estimated Time: ~24 min

- Watch "[The 'Deadly Food' We All Eat](#)" (3:31)
- Watch "[The Problem With Palm Oil](#)" (2:46)
- Read "['Sustainable palm oil' may not be so sustainable after all](#)" (7 min)
- Read the 2011 article "[HECO Pursues Palm Oil](#)" (5 min)
*In 2013, HECO dropped the project under pressure from environmental organizations.

TERMINOLOGY

- **Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO)** - An industry-led nonprofit that aims to promote sustainable palm oil production, reducing damage to the rainforest and indigenous people.

KAHOOT QUIZ

- Go to Kahoot.it or use the Kahoot mobile app and enter the pin 08516877
- Or, use [this link](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why does the first video call palm oil a "deadly food"? How does it impact rainforests and wildlife?
- Why are environmental NGOs like the World Wildlife Foundation and Greenpeace not calling for a boycott of palm oil?
- What is 'sustainable palm oil'?
- What is the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil and how does it work? What groups participate and what are their roles?
- What is the criticism directed towards the RSPO?
- Why is it so difficult to identify which products contain palm oil and which do not?



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (continued)

- Other than RSPO, what certifications or seals exist to assure consumers about the sustainability of the products they buy? Do you think this is an effective way to address issues relating to sustainability, or are these efforts falling short?
- Why might environmental organizations have pressured HECO to stop using palm oil as a biofuel in 2013?
- In your opinion, does the fact that the palm oil for Hawaii would have come from Malaysia and not Indonesia make a difference? Why or why not? Given the same context of the article, what would you have done?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [“Why Palm Oil Is So Cheap”](#) (7:18)
This video by Business Insider describes the rise of palm oil, the deforestation caused by the industry, the introduction of the RSPO, and the barriers the industry faces in achieving the RSPO’s mission.
- [“A Pale Shade of Green: The Palm Oil Industry’s Effort To Curb Deforestation Has A Lot Of Flaws”](#)
Use one of your monthly free Economist articles to read this analysis of the progress and continued shortcomings of sustainability in the palm oil industry.
- [“Palm Oil Was Supposed to Help Save The Planet. Instead It Unleashed A Catastrophe.”](#)
This feature-length New York Times article discusses how American policy created a decade ago helped shape the massive deforestation and other abuses in the palm oil industry across the ocean. Use your NYT subscription or one of your free articles for the month to read.
- More on the RSPO
 - [Rspo.org](#)
 - [“How can palm oil be more sustainable? The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil and WWF's role in it”](#) (6:30)
The World Wildlife Fund published this promotional video explaining how the RSPO functions.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

Easier

- Try to identify which of the daily products you use and foods you consume contain palm oil and how much of it is RSPO-certified. When you go shopping, keep an eye out for this labelling and try to purchase fewer products with palm oil that is not sustainably-produced.



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IDEAS FOR ACTION (continued)

Medium

- Consumer advocacy: Identify your favorite brands and research if their products contain unsustainably-produced palm oil. Contact them on social media or through their websites and tell them why you do or do not support the product.
- Spread awareness: make a poster explaining the pros and cons of palm oil, or a series of pamphlets on the various controversies surrounding it and post them to your social media or, with permission, around your school.
 - Write a short summary of the New York Times article (in Additional Resources section) and submit it to your school newspaper.
- Get involved: Do some more research and contact some of the environmental nonprofits mentioned in the lesson and interview them on how sustainable palm oil has been evolving. Ask them how you can get involved in the debate.
- Broaden your knowledge: Research other seals or certifications of sustainability. Who grants them? How rigorous and how effective are they?
 - Examples: organic, fair trade International, fair trade USA, non-GMO, grass-fed, Rainforest Alliance, etc.

Hard

- Policy advocacy: research bills in the city council and state legislature related to product labelling. Write and submit testimony.

HAWAII CORE STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES (HCSSS) LINKS

- Content Standard [SS.WH.8.12.1](#)
- Content Standard [SS.WH.8.7.2](#)
- Content Standard [SS.US.12.16.2](#)
- Content Standard [SS.PID.4.16.3](#)
- Action Projects link to [SS.PID.5.7.1](#)

This lesson was created by Paige Lockwood.