

The Montpellier Declaration

Europe's central role in advancing sustainable palm oil

The collaboration of environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) with palm oil producing companies and buyers of palm oil has led to an attitudinal shift towards sustainable oil palm plantation management. European companies working alongside NGOs have been instrumental in advancing the sustainable palm oil agenda. The largest palm oil producing companies in Southeast Asia have responded positively to initiatives such as the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), by implementing practices that improve both environmental and social sustainability of oil palm production. In recognition that the RSPO does not yet prevent deforestation or peat land degradation, a number of large producers, retailers and manufacturer companies and NGOs developed the Palm Oil Innovation Group (POIG) as an alternative. Most of these companies have committed to achieving zero deforestation through protecting High Conservation Value areas including peatland and High Carbon Stock forest.

Recent successes in promoting certified palm oil production have not been matched by the commitments of consumer companies to exclusively source certified palm oil or to pay premiums for responsible sources. As a result, the supply of certified palm oil currently outstrips global demand. Moreover, the smallholder production sector is not yet sufficiently engaged in the sustainable market, nor does it have access to such a market.

Europe consumes nearly 15% of global palm oil production. The European consumer market is very environmentally aware and sensitive. Europe therefore has a pivotal role in leading global initiatives to advance the adoption of sustainable palm oil production and supply chain management. Indeed, many European countries already committed themselves to exclusive sourcing of sustainable palm oil by 2015, but these targets have not been wholly achieved.

The European retail and manufacturing sector can contribute to sustainable palm oil initiatives by developing pathways through which the smallholder sector can gain better access to certified palm oil markets. Yet current engagement in cross-European platforms for dialogue and policy development among the private and public sectors is insufficient.

WE, the 751 scientists and conservationists from 54 nations gathered at this 53rd annual meeting of The Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation (ATBC), held in

Montpellier, France, from 19 - 23 July 2016, the largest meeting of tropical biologists ever in Europe:

Acknowledge and commend recent developments towards sustainable palm oil production. We also recognize that there remains much work to be done, particularly in increasing the demand for certified and responsibly sourced palm oil, and in integrating smallholder producers into certified palm oil markets.

ATBC recommends that

1. The European retail and manufacturer sectors ensure the transparency of their palm oil supply chains all the way to the plantation;
2. All European manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers commit to sourcing palm oil exclusively from responsible sources¹;
3. The European retail and manufacturer sectors works with relevant NGOs to develop pathways for stronger smallholder engagement in, and access to, the responsible palm oil market;
4. The European Union plus Switzerland establish coordinated 100% sustainable palm oil commitments, and deliver on these commitments;
5. The European governments facilitate the mainstreaming of responsible palm oil sources across the EU by enhancing platforms for dialogue among retailers, producers, NGOs, and with governments;
6. EU financial institutions, investors and pension funds ensure they only invest in businesses associated with responsible palm oil sources;
7. EU governments engage with national governments in producer countries to develop meaningful, transparent, and universally shared codes of conduct for certification;
8. EU governments explore the inclusion of certified sustainable products, including palm oil, within their Convention on Biological Diversity agreements.

23rd June 2016, Montpellier, France

¹ Either RSPO or The Sustainable Agriculture Network (SAN) certified with physical traceability and additional verification of No Deforestation, No Peatland and No Exploitation, or third party verified from a POIG producer
