

Palm Oil Q&A for Docents

Deforestation for palm oil threatens endangered species. So why shouldn't I boycott palm oil?

If you personally choose to get all of your sustenance from the farmer's market, that's fine. You're not really helping OR hurting the situation. But you should NOT write letters to brands & companies with the war cry "Palm oil is the enemy, palm oil is bad! Boycott palm oil!" Because if you do, brands will replace the palm oil with a different, even LESS sustainable vegetable oil, which will increase the rate of deforestation.

So then how do I know what is safe to buy?

Some companies use sustainably-sourced palm oil. Others don't. (Unfortunately, it's not always this black and white. Some larger companies get a certain percentage of their palm oil sustainably, and the rest is questionable.) Palm oil apps, RSPO.org, as well as the brand or parent company website will have information about whether or not they use sustainably sourced palm oil.

I still don't get what I should do.

Survey what you normally buy at the grocery store. If palm oil or palm kernel oil is listed in the ingredients, check to see how that product is ranked in the palm oil app, or go to the company website and look for something like a 'Palm Oil Action Plan.' If they don't have one, write to them, email them, fill out the contact form on their website, tweet them! Let them know that you are concerned about the rainforest and you wish they would use sustainably sourced palm oil. As for the brands/companies that DO show a concern for using sustainably sourced palm oil, continue buying from them, support them, and let them know that the fact that they care means you will continue to buy their product.

This is a complicated issue! How do I talk about it with zoo guests?

Zoo guests came to the zoo to have a good time, and to look at and learn about the zoo animals. Start there. Help facilitate a true connection between the zoo animals and the zoo guests by sharing your story with them. Tell them why you care about the animals so much. It won't take long for the zoo guests to start to care too, and that's when you can surprise them by saying "You can help save [this species] just by buying the right brands at the grocery store."

Some Helpful Resources (check out Google for more):

<http://www.rspo.org>

<http://www.cmzoo.org/docs/palmOilShoppingGuide.pdf>

<http://www.ucsusa.org/global-warming/stop-deforestation/palm-oil-scorecard-2015#.Vf19eSgViko>

http://www.zooatlanta.org/media/file/halloween_candy_Guide2011.pdf