

PALM OIL PERSPECTIVES – PLANTATIONS

CAT BARTON VIDEO

Teachers will find the narration of the following video helpful:

<https://www.chesterzoo.org/schools/resources/palm-oil-perspectives-plantations/>

Subject: Geography 7-11 11-14

Curriculum links:

- Geography
- Citizenship
- Conservation

Cat Barton, Chester Zoo's Field Conservation Manager explores palm oil plantations in Indonesia and some of the issues and solutions around palm oil production.

VIDEO CLIP

Narration of video 'palm oil perspectives'

Palm oil is the most widely used vegetable oil around the world and it is a huge part of the economy in countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. At the moment 85% of palm oil is grown in Indonesia and Malaysia. They employ millions of people in the industry and so a lot of people are getting all of their income from this one industry. It can be grown on areas of land where there is nothing there but what has happened in the past is a plantation has been growing where there is previously been rainforest so the rainforest would've had to have been deforested to create the plantation.

So there is a few different sides to plantation; you have the area where the oil palm is grown in. This is the area which is a monoculture forest, which is an agricultural field just growing palm oil. You will see a lot of workers covered from head to toe in protective gear. They need this to protect themselves from all the pesticides and fertiliser. You will see a lot of people wearing hardhats and going in in big trucks with all the chemicals. When it comes to harvesting time you have a lot of workers around just hacking of the fruits off the top of the oil palm trees. These are all collected from the side of the road and a truck and then come again along and they will all be loaded into the truck and the truck then drives through the plantation to get to the mill. As part of the plantation you often have a mill associated with it as well.

Oil palm plantations can be owned by multinational companies like large corporations or they can be owned by smallholders; so just local people who have just got a plantation in their backyard. A small hold is just someone who was just trying to make their own living.

Palm oil is the most efficient vegetable oil which is around at the moment. It produces more yield than any type of vegetable oil. Five times more palm oil is produced per hector than any other type of vegetable oil. So boycotting pain oil for us just really isn't an option at the moment. Demand for vegetable oils, any type of vegetable oil is growing and particular for palm oil. It is such a big part of the economy in Malaysia and Indonesia. So many people are employed by it so it is not just a case of not buying palm oil anymore, for us it's making sure that that palm oil is grown sustainably.

The roundtable on sustainable palm oil was set up in 2004 and this is the most recognised global certification scheme for sustainable palm oil. And what happens is there are a set of criteria that are laid out for plantation owners which they need to follow before they can become certified. So, some of the key ones are:

- That no rainforest would've been deforested for that plantation in the first place
- That no significant wildlife on the original land so there was no wildlife impacted by the plantation
- For the plantation to be certified it needs to make sure it takes good care of its workers; so they take human rights into account, there is fair pay, they give workers with families really good benefits like free nursery and schooling for their children so there is a really big social aspect
- For the wildlife in particular the plantations will need to make sure that they try and maintain the wildlife if there's wildlife found in that area. They can often do this through habitat corridors.

So, what you tend to find a plantation doing is designating an area of the site that connects to some natural habitat and they will plant that with natural trees so the wildlife can still move through. There are a number of plantations that we've heard about that have elephants for example going through the forest corridor, which is really good.

For us it is really important to see the oil farm industry becomes a fully sustainable industry. We are obviously really concerned about some of the key wildlife like Orangutans and the impact that oil palm plantations are having on them. As the demand for palm oil is increasing, especially in the western worlds is more and more pressure being put on Indonesia and Malaysia and countries like that to produce more palm oil.

Demand is expected to double again by 2050, so that is going to put even more pressure on the wildlife in those countries. So, it is really important that the palm oil is produced is produced sustainably which means it is impacting the wildlife less and impacting the environment less. So, this is not only good for the wildlife in that we can hopefully get some of these wildlife corridors connecting habitats again and we can actually improve the situation for wildlife on the ground. But it's really good for the people as well. So as part of the certification to be RSPO certified, workers need to be fairly paid so it is much better for the local people who are working in the plantations because it makes sure that the workers are being paid fairly and they have got a really good standard of work

