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## Summary Position: Palm Oil

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Palm oil is a hugely versatile and productive crop. Its neutral taste, heat stability and smooth texture have made it a firm favourite in food and other consumer products. From a dietary viewpoint many of its uses are benign, yet it is a major ingredient in some processed foods which are linked to poor diets. Despite its high land use efficiency in terms of yield, about half of oil palm development between 1972 and 2015 expanded into forested lands.

The Soil Association supports a 'less and better' approach to palm oil. By 'less', we not only wish to see a reduction in demand for palm oil but in the over-all unnecessary reliance on vegetable oils. We can achieve this by consuming less over-processed foods and beauty products, demanding less public money to be spent on biofuel incentives, and reducing food waste. We support the substitution of palm oil with other oils so long as careful consideration has been made regarding the sustainability impacts of chosen alternatives. It is preferable to choose oils produced in Europe. Non-organic coconut oil has also been associated with high levels of deforestation. WWF found that only the replacement of palm oil with rapeseed and sunflower oil produced in Europe would lower pressure on biodiversity; but for processors this is not always technically possible.

By 'better', we advise that where palm oil is to be used, the Soil Association believes that organic palm oil is the most sustainable option. This is because organic producers tend to score very well against (and in combination with) other certifications on almost all sustainability criteria ([Fibl 2019](#)). There are a small number of organic oil palm producing companies worldwide (about 0.04% of total palm oil production is organic). Many of these growers are pioneers in sustainable production. Not only do they have to meet tightly regulated organic standards which restrict the use of harmful inputs, but they also tend to work very closely with smallholders and communities – supporting their economic development and livelihoods, and/or other certifications such as the RSPO to generate wide-ranging positive social, environmental and economic impacts.

At the Soil Association we know that supply chains do not always permit the use of organic palm oil, especially in non-organic products. Where organic is not available/cannot be used, we advocate the following options:

- RSPO Identity Preserved

- RSPO Segregated
- POIG certified

We welcome the recent strengthening of RSPO standards in November 2018 to provide greater protection for secondary forest, peatlands and indigenous communities.

The Soil Association advocates for diversity in food production and appropriate land use – this means we support the responsible production of palm oil on existing agricultural land where it is most appropriate to do so. We do not advocate a complete ban on the use of palm oil. We recognise the important role that the responsible production of palm oil plays on sustainable livelihoods in tropical countries.

**Relevance of this policy position to the current consultation:** Given the recent strengthening of RSPO standards, Soil Association now believes there may be additional benefits to requiring a combination of organic certification and RSPO certification for oil palm ingredients used in Soil Association certified organic food and feed products. We are consulting with relevant licensees to explore the implications of this approach.

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