



A Petition Changes the Food Industry

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☀ Call to Action

When you go to the supermarket the next time, check the ingredients list on the products in your shopping cart. If they include palm oil, try to find alternatives. If you can't, it's okay: the most important step is the first one— becoming aware of the problem. You can also follow Harv, the friendly orangutan on Twitter: @Harv49905493

☀ Values

- Determined
- Persistent
- Courageous
- Leaders
- Environmentalists

☀ Lessons Learned

Learning about the ingredients used in the products we consume is important.

As Asha says, if you think something is wrong, you can change it: but you have to put the effort into it.

When you become aware of a problem, it is important to learn about it and try to come up with solutions.

Asha (12) and her sister Jia (10) love orangutans.

So they were shocked to learn that their favorite cereal was made with palm oil--after all, the production of palm oil means that large swaths of rainforest, the orangutans' natural habitat, are being cut down every year. They started an online petition and intense lobbying effort to force a global company to change its business practices. With more than 800,000 signatures, their initiative was a spectacular success--and the sisters already have plans to continue their efforts to help save our rainforests.

☀ Language Arts

Read Asha and Jia's original petition. Then make a bullet-point list of the strategies they used to encourage people to sign their petition. Which of these strategies would you use to write your own petition, and why?

Write a letter trying to persuade a company to switch from using palm oil to a more sustainable alternative.

How would you combine these three rhetorical approaches—ethos, pathos and logos (ethics, feelings, and logic)—to maximize the persuasiveness of your letter?

Write the script for a PSA (public service announcement) aimed at raising awareness on the issue of palm oil and the environmental devastation that is associated with it.

Create a video of your PSA. Work as a team to research the statistics, find or create cool graphics, record a voiceover using your script, and edit the video. Share it with your friends, school, community, social media.

Standards are essential in improving food production--whether regarding products that use palm oil, or

the many other commodities we rely on. Researchers and environmental organizations have publicized the limits to current standards. Review this Greenpeace report and this [Monga bay article](#)¹ and write an essay on how you would go about making palm oil standards stronger.

STEM Activities

Palm oil has become a staple ingredient in many products that we consume on a daily basis. When the Green Century Balance Fund filed a shareholder resolution against Starbucks over concerns about their use of non-sustainable palm oil, they switched to buying 100 percent of their palm oil from certified sustainable sources.

- **Research one food company** that still uses palm oil that is not sustainably sourced; then write a letter to the company detailing the harmful effects of palm oil, and offering sustainable alternatives.

Palm oil production accounted for approximately 8 percent of the world's deforestation from 1990-2008. In addition to the displacement of orangutans, deforestation has numerous other harmful effects, including the displacement of other species, and an increase in carbon emissions.

- **Compile a list of other species that are being endangered**, or lost, as a result of deforestation.
- **Research the increased amount of carbon emissions** caused by palm oil deforestation. Compare these effects to the effects of sustainable palm oil production. Resource: [Palm Oil: The Carbon Cost of Deforestation](#)².

Conventional palm oil production is an example of monoculture farming, where only one crop is grown in a given area at a time. Monoculture farming has been shown to decrease biodiversity and expedite the spread of diseases.

- **As a class, research and brainstorm the different types of sustainable farming techniques** (for example, permaculture, polyculture, crop rotation, and hydroponics/aquaponics).
- **Working in small groups, have students incorporate one sustainable farming technique into a plan to redesign a monocultural palm oil farm.** To be sustainable, the farm must maintain good public health; improve quality of life; be profitable; promote biodiversity; and responsibly manage natural resources. Then have students present their design to the rest of the class.

Sustainability Innovations

Many organizations have made it their goal to reduce the use of and adjust the production process of palm oil:

- **[Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil \(RSPO\)](#)**³ - This NGO connects stakeholders from the seven sectors of the palm oil industry to develop standards for palm oil.
- **[Palm Oil Innovation Group](#)**⁴ - This group helps to connect individuals who are building on the RSPO standards in order to improve responsible palm oil production practices, and share stories about company/individual success.

RSPO has made progress toward expanding their network of companies to become RSPO-certified, but there are many products that still need to receive certification. [L'Occitane en Provence](#)⁵, a French company, received their RSPO certification in 2011 and is striving to support sustainable farmers/initiatives. Here is some information on their sustainable sourcing:

- **Research two companies** that are RSPO-certified whose products you use, or would consider using.

Sustainability Career Pathways

Corporate Sustainability Officer. As Asha and Jia demonstrated, companies tend to prioritize growth, even at the expense of the

environment (and thus society’s long-term well-being as well as their own). Corporate cultures are slow to change, but change has started. Many companies now have a corporate sustainability officer to help drive change from within. This career path offers the opportunity to improve the environmental effects of the world’s most influential businesses. Want to learn how? Read [here](#)⁶ and [here](#)⁷.

Forest Ecologist. Forests are deeply threatened by climate change—from invasive pests killing countless trees to dry conditions that are causing more and more catastrophic fires. Better understanding forests, and how trees can adapt to these changes will be essential to protecting the “lungs of the land.” As a [forest ecologist](#)⁸ you can help!

Agroforester. While forests are often cut down and replaced with forest plantations to grow trees for lumber or palm oil, the field of [agroforestry](#)⁹—the sustainable farming of forest crops, from coffee and cocoa to maple syrup and mushrooms—is rapidly developing. [You can learn more about this field here](#)¹⁰.

Sustainable Agriculture. More young people are being drawn to careers in farming, as groups like [The Greenhorns](#)¹¹ reveal. If you’re interested in being a farmer, this [introduction to the field of sustainable agriculture](#)¹² is a good place to start.

Want to help make the food system more sustainable, but not sure how specifically you want to contribute? Here’s a great [essay](#)¹³ that explores the many ways that you can help make the food system more sustainable through careers in agriculture, communications, advocacy, law, and public health.

1 <https://news.mongabay.com/2018/07/rspo-fails-to-deliver-on-environmental-and-social-sustainability-study-finds/>

2 <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/06/180619123018.htm>

3 <https://www.rspo.org/about>

4 <http://poig.org/further-resources/rspo-and-poig/>

5 <https://www.loccitane.com/en-us/pages?fdid=sustainable-sourcing>

6 <https://www.careerexplorer.com/careers/sustainability-officer/>

7 <https://impakter.com/choosing-the-harder-path-the-journey-towards-a-job-in-corporate-sustainability/>

8 <https://bestaccreditedcolleges.org/articles/become-a-forest-ecologist-education-and-career-roadmap.html>

9 <https://newcropsorganics.ces.ncsu.edu/herb/medicinal-herbs-and-non-timber-forest-products/forest-farming-in-north-america/>

10 <https://www.environmentalscience.org/career/agroforester>

11 <https://greenhorns.org/>

12 <https://greencollarblog.org/sustainable-agriculture-jobs/>

13 <https://foodprint.org/blog/get-to-work-jobs-in-food-sustainability/>

