



## MAKING CHESTER THE WORLD'S FIRST SUSTAINABLE PALM OIL CITY

WORDS: MATTHEW BRIDSON ILLUSTRATIONS: CHESTER ZOO

Chester is stepping forward as a champion in the fight for environmental change, leading the way in a new movement that's set to send out ripples of positive action worldwide.

Already well on its way to becoming the UK's first straw-free city, it isn't resting on its eco-friendly laurels; in an exciting bid, launched by Chester Zoo, Chester has set its sights on becoming the world's first 'Sustainable Palm Oil City'.

Current palm oil production is causing a crisis for both wildlife and the environment. In response, Chester Zoo's conservationists are calling out to local restaurants, schools, visitor attractions, hotels, retailers, workplaces with staff catering services, and individuals to join their groundbreaking sustainability cause.

Thanks to the initiative, you can be a part of the action needed to tackle the complex issues at hand, starting right here in the city. So can I. So can every we know.

Awareness about the pros, and not just the cons, of palm oil is a key part of Chester Zoo's campaign, so, before we find out what action's planned, let's take a look at the facts...

# what IS PALM OIL?

SUSTAINABLE  
PALM OIL  
CHALLENGE

Palm oil comes from the **FRUIT AND SEED** of the **oil palm plant**, native to *West Africa*



Palm oil is the **WORLD'S MOST** commonly used *vegetable oil*

PALM OIL can be found in over  
**50%** of products on  
supermarket  
shelves

**85%** of PALM OIL  
is grown in  
*Indonesia* and **Malaysia**

## What actually is palm oil?

Palm oil is a vegetable oil that's extracted from the fruit of oil palm trees and features in a massive number of products we use every single day.

If you head into almost any UK supermarket, you can guarantee that nearly 50% of everything sold there – cakes, biscuits, margarine, beauty products, shampoo, soap, cleaning materials – will contain palm oil.

On top of all that, it's also used as bio-fuel for everything from diesel engines to entire power stations. Pretty multi-purpose stuff, to say the least.

## Why is palm oil so popular?

If you're anything like me, you'll probably have had only the dimmest awareness, even just a few years back, of palm oil's existence, let alone what it was used in or why there was any controversy about producing it.

With the dawn of the digital era, though, our awareness about palm oil use has skyrocketed.

I defy anyone not to have been moved by the animated 2019 Christmas advert from supermarket chain, Iceland, which went viral recently. Contentiously banned from television >>

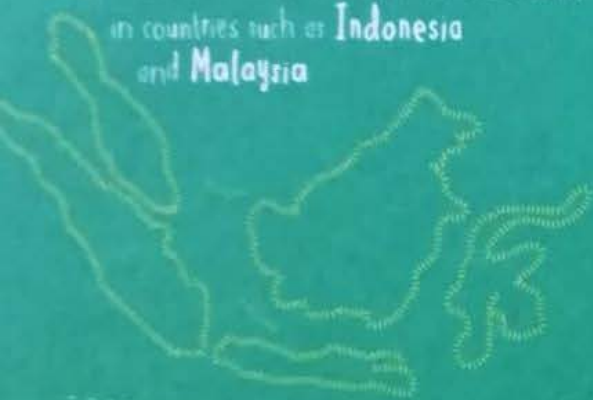
# What's about **GOOD** PALM OIL?

It's **VERSATILE, CHEAP** and **EFFICIENT!**

Growing oil palm trees is the most **efficient use of land** for producing oil - it produces **twice as much** as coconut trees and **over thirty times** as much maize



It's an **IMPORTANT PART OF THE ECONOMY** in countries such as **Indonesia** and **Malaysia**



It can be **ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY** if it is *grown sustainably!*

broadcast because its firm stance against selling palm oil products was deemed too "political", Iceland (the head office of which is actually based just over the Welsh border from Chester, in Deeside) took to social media to share the advert's powerful message instead.

Now, with this ongoing social media focus has come a widespread perception that palm oil is basically the devil. I'd certainly come to believe so, at any rate.

Despite its bad rep, however, it turns out that palm oil itself is actually sort of amazing in lots of ways... It's a bold statement, I know, but hear me out on this one.

You see, oil palm trees are highly

productive plants. They're very cheap and easy to cultivate, because they require little fertiliser and provide an incredibly high yield per square kilometre (tens of times more than other mass-cultivated plants like coconut and maize). No wonder it's so popular with producers.

In theory, then, all those efficient attributes mean that palm oil has the potential to become an environmentally friendly product extraordinaire, if farmed sustainably.

## What's the problem with using it, then?

The real issue is that palm oil mostly isn't sustainably farmed.

Roughly 85% of the world's palm oil is produced in Malaysia and Indonesia, where the ever-growing demand for it has brought about the rapid expansion of oil palm plantations, most of which are totally unregulated.

The industry is causing devastation to the natural world. Enormous swathes of rainforest in South East Asia are being cleared to make way for palm plantations, obliterating the habitats of orangutans, tigers, rhinos, and elephants, and eradicating the local wildlife that they need to survive.

Now, numbers for these already endangered species are plunging terrifyingly fast.

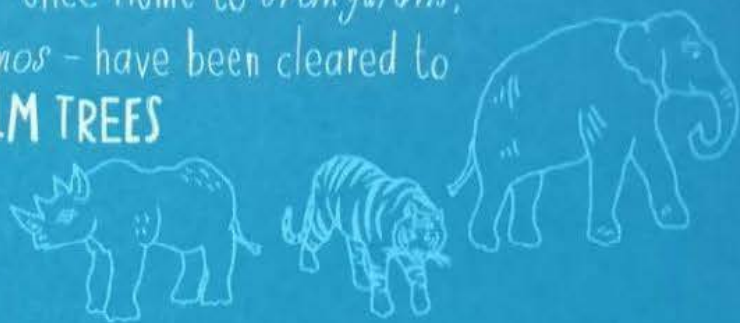
If all that weren't bad enough, the world's climate is being impacted too: when the rainforests are removed and the peat lands they're situated on are drained, carbon is released from the soil and directly into the atmosphere; more greenhouse gases are added to the hazardous levels we're experiencing and global warming ramps up.

It simply can't go on.



# What's **BAD** about palm oil?

- Vast areas of rainforest - once home to *orangutans, tigers, elephants and rhinos* - have been cleared to **MAKE WAY FOR OIL PALM TREES**
- Oil palm plantations can't sustain the native wildlife - as a result, **ANIMAL NUMBERS** are falling fast
- **DEMAND IS INCREASING** and the industry is growing and spreading to other countries - including the *Philippines, Nigeria* and those in *South America*



## So, how do we solve the issue?

Here's where it gets a little complicated... We can't just suddenly stop making palm oil. It's not a black and white situation like it is with single use plastics, which we can say, without question, are entirely bad.

For one, if we did stop farming for palm oil, we'd have to replace it with alternatives to meet demand; replacing plantations with other, less high-yield vegetable oil crops would mean yet more land required, which would mean yet more deforestation to cultivate less efficient produce.

Don't forget too, that many thousands of jobs depend on the industry, so stopping production overnight would prove catastrophic to people's lives.

Palm oil itself is a beneficial product, but it's the wider palm farming industry that needs to change. In recent years, a group called the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) has created a set of standards for sustainable palm oil production with minimal impact on local environment, wildlife, and people. As a result, various industry organisations are beginning to produce and source palm oil according to these standards - in fact, some are taking action well beyond them, while the standards continue to evolve for the better, which is a fantastic step in the right direction.

This summer, an alliance of UK industry associations and Non-Governmental Organisations signed the Amsterdam Commitment, with the goal of bringing about 100% sustainable palm oil use in Europe by 2020. >>

# WHAT CAN WE DO?

## What is the 'Chester Sustainable Palm Oil City' campaign and how can we help?

Conservation trusts, like Chester Zoo, are working to help these RSPO standards go from strength to strength; most importantly, too, they're working hard to create a shift in public awareness.

With the introduction of the Chester Sustainable Palm Oil City campaign, Chester Zoo is calling on businesses and organisations in the city to join its initiative by adopting a sustainable palm oil policy with their help.

Working alongside these partners to audit their supply chains, Chester Zoo is on a mission to put the city on the map and create a chain reaction that will continue to spread awareness and grow the demand for sustainability nationally and far, far beyond.

Restaurant, Chez Jules, and the University of Chester are just some of the local names that have already pledged their support to the cause, and other citywide organisations are quickly following suit. Once enough champions have signed up, Chester will officially

receive its Sustainable Palm Oil City status – a world first.

Faye Sherlock, Project Officer for Chester Zoo's Act For Wildlife programme, shared her hopes for the scheme with Tortoise: "our city campaign is such an exciting way for businesses in Chester to come together and make a real impact on the demand for sustainable palm oil."

"Chester is leading the world on this issue," Faye continued, "and we're extremely proud of our champions who're making changes to their supply chain to ensure products are sustainably sourced."

To make sure everyone can get involved, the Zoo has even pulled together a Sustainable Palm Oil Shopping List of brands that are RSPO certified, downloadable online. With it, we can all do our bit to support sustainability in the palm oil industry – one person, and one shopping basket, at a time.

**So, come on, Chester. Let's make history. 🌱**

Join Chester Zoo's #PalmOilChallenge -  
find out more and how you can get involved, here:

[WWW.ACTFORWILDLIFE.ORG.UK/PALMOIL](http://WWW.ACTFORWILDLIFE.ORG.UK/PALMOIL)