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Companies want to make palm oil production more sustainable

Procuring palm oil from environmentally friendly and socially responsible sources, continuing to develop the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), creating a greater impact on the ground and initiating innovations are among the goals of the eight founding members of Palm Oil Network Switzerland.

Barry Callebaut, Coop, Florin, Migros, M-Industry, Nestlé Switzerland, Nutriswiss and Pro Fair Trade join forces for long-term improvements in the palm oil supply chain. The stakeholders of the network have set the following goals:

- To import palm oil and palm kernel oil intended for processing in the food industry exclusively from sustainable sources. Importers Florin and Nutriswiss already import 100% of their palm oil from RSPO-certified and segregated sources.
- To continue developing sustainability standards, in particular those of the RSPO, and create a greater impact. In order to achieve this goal, suppliers will be subject to a monitoring process to ensure that additional criteria that exceed the current RSPO standard are implemented.
- To ensure transparency and traceability in the entire supply chain all the way to the producer (plantations, cooperatives) until 2025.
- To initiate innovations and expand the scope of action. In this regard, one of the specified goals is to audit producers of other tropical fats and oils, such as coconut oil, for compliance with sustainability criteria.

Palm Oil Network Switzerland will measure its performance at regular intervals, inform the public about progress and challenges, promote networking at a global level and enter into a dialogue with NGOs and the public sector. An advisory group of recognised experts from non-governmental organisations, research institutions and the Swiss federal government is to support the network in designing implementation programmes and concepts for continued development.

The first joint project, a benchmark study, was commissioned to assess the existing sustainability standards established in the palm oil sector. The study, financed by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO, identifies potential for improvement in the individual standards and thus provides an appropriate basis for dialogue with standards organisations. The results of the study will soon be available on www.palmoilnetwork.ch.

In 2019, Switzerland imported 23,700 metric tons of palm oil and palm kernel oil for the food industry. A decade ago and at 32,000 metric tons, the volume of imports was one-third higher than it is today. Malaysia and the Solomon Islands each account for around 30% of the palm oil imports. Other source countries include Cote d'Ivoire, Papua New Guinea and Cambodia.

Contact: Stefan Kausch, Coordinator Palm Oil Network Switzerland, Tel.: +41 (0)61 261 40 81, Mobile: +41 (0)76 349 66 94, info@palmoelnetzwerk.ch, www.palmoilnetwork.ch