

CSPI mislead consumers on Orangutans

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In Malaysia, the expansion of oil palm plantations over the last decade came mostly from the conversion of other economic crops such as rubber, cocoa and coconut, while the balance came from logged-over forests of areas zoned for agriculture. Comprehensive laws and acts governing the environment are in place and enforced strictly by Malaysia's Department of Environment and its environmental scientists. Particular emphasis is given for developments where there may be endangered species needing protection. The areas planted with oil palm are well within the 6.02 million hectares designated for agriculture under the Third Malaysia Agriculture Plan. To date, the total land area in Malaysia is 32.83 million hectares of which 19.54 million hectares or 60% is still retained under forest cover, and together with the perennial tree crops makes up 76.3% of the total cover under tree crop. Very few once-forested countries can claim likewise. This demonstrates a high level of environmental awareness with proven eco-friendly and sustainable practices. It is a shame that CSPI has resorted to cheap tactics without making any efforts to understand what Malaysia has successfully done to ensure responsible development of industry and continuous protection of the orangutan. It is about time that CSPI "walks the talk". A single hectare of oil palm can now produce about 4-5 tonnes of palm oil per year with best yields giving 7-8 tonnes; far more productive than other oil seed crops. Combining such natural efficiency and a productive lifespan of 25-30 years ensures the world a sustainable and steady supply of palm oil. Malaysia has enriched the diet of more of the world's poor and undernourished; much more than can be claimed by many non-governmental organisations. Agriculture, palm oil in particular, has been the backbone of the country's development, especially in the rural areas. It provides direct employment of 570,000 people, not including the support industries and spin-off activities created. The Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) was established in 1956, tasked with reducing rural poverty through land development and promotion of economical viable crops. Today, with its proven track record, FELDA is widely recognised as a model for poverty eradication, a concept that is supported by the World Bank and the United Nations. Many livelihoods have been improved as a result of the programme through the sustainable oil palm industry. Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil The Malaysian oil palm industry is the prime mover of the Roundtable for Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). Supported by NGO's in reinforcing responsible development and maintenance of plantations which are already being widely practiced here, it has been promoting RSPO initiatives and best practices in improving productivity and efficiency with minimal impact on the environment. The orangutan is a Malaysian treasure which is totally protected. To ensure that the orangutan population is protected and will continue to exist in perpetuity, various policies, operational and strategic measures have been taken and will continue to be enforced by the various state governments. Two forest reserves, Ulu Segama and Malua, which cover a total area of 237,777 hectares and form the heartland of Sabah's orangutan population have recently been designated sustainable forest management areas to preserve the areas' biodiversity. A state Wildlife Department study showed that there were some 1,100 primates in the Malua and a further 3,300 in the Ulu Segama areas. How can consumers be fully educated and make an informed decision if they are told only half truths. To make matters worse the half that is told is full of inaccuracies and exaggeration. Pictures of so-called orphaned orangutan may move consumers' emotions and keep them away from the supermarket aisle selling palm oil products, but this will not necessarily help towards conservation efforts. Yet, there is another story that needs to be told to consumers of the great pains being taken by Malaysian oil palm industry that enjoys no government subsidies but yet has successfully competed with highly protected farmers in United States and Europe to conserve biodiversity in and around the oil palm plantations, and most importantly to maintain a balance between industrial, social and economic needs as well as protection of the environment. CSPI's act is ultimately hurting a lot of innocent people whose livelihood depend on the oil palm industry and aspire for a better life through good business practices. Although CSPI's (Center for Science in the Public Interest) message attempts to convince the consumers that consuming palm oil will supposedly harm the orangutan, this act is ultimately hurting a lot of innocent people whose livelihood depends on the oil palm industry and aspires for a better life through good business practices. It is obvious that CSPI through its article and advertisements has deliberately attempted to spread misinformation by giving nothing but one-sided negative information which is not verified by any reliable sources, and unnecessarily raising alarm amongst consumers and consequently hurting the oil palm industry, affecting the livelihood of many especially the smallholders. The advertisement by CSPI appears to be in bad faith using guilt-based rhetoric to scare and gain sympathy from the public. CSPI should cease to make unsubstantiated claims and wrongful accusations that the orangutan are dying as a result of palm oil expansion. The facts speak for themselves. The orangutan is a Malaysian treasure and as an endangered species this primate is totally protected. THE END.