

## Consequences of growing palm oil trees

### Information sheet A – Palm oil briefing

In 2006 in Malaysia 4 165 215 hectares of land were planted with palm oil trees. These trees produced 15 880 487 tonnes of crude palm oil. 14 403 845 tonnes of this oil was exported to other countries. The sale of this oil earned 22 653.4 million Malaysian Ringgits (over 3 million pounds).

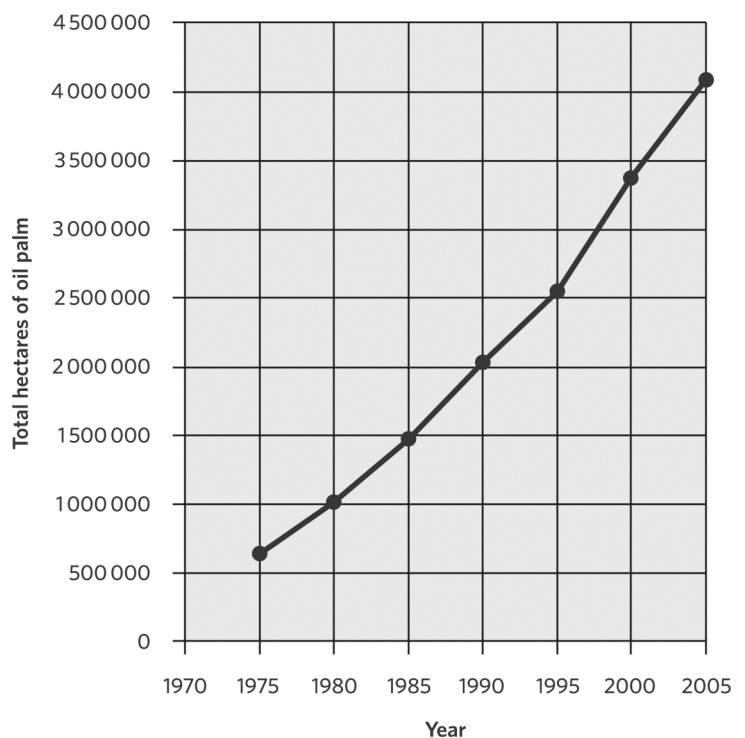
Palm oil is used to make food (for example, margarine, confectionery), soaps, detergents and cosmetics and for frying snack foods. Palm oil is also used to make biodiesel. Biodiesel is a renewable energy source and is less polluting than fossil fuels, because it is very low in sulphur. Biodiesel is also CO<sub>2</sub> neutral – the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> taken in during photosynthesis equals the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> released when the fuel is burnt. However, when considering whether biofuels are sustainable the entire production chain including cultivation, production and transport needs to be taken into account. It may be that using biodiesel as a fuel produces more greenhouse gases than the fossil fuels that would otherwise be used. Many governments are however only interested in the fact that biofuels provide an alternative to fossil fuels.

To make space for palm oil plantations, more and more forest needs to be cut down. Forests act as a global 'air conditioner' by absorbing carbon dioxide, storing the carbon, and releasing oxygen.

Forests contain a large percentage of the world's biodiversity – from mammals such as the orang-utan, tiger and panda to millions of species of insects and plants. Many of the world's medicines, including drugs like quinine and those used to combat cancer are made from rainforest trees. We may destroy a species of plant that could contain a future life-saving drug.

Forests also provide local people with energy for cooking and heating in places where no other resources may be available.

Most of the nutrients of a rainforest are stored in its vegetation rather than in the soil. So when the trees are cut down, the soil rapidly becomes poor and easily eroded.



Data obtained from <http://mpob.gov.my> the website of the Malaysian Palm Oil Board