

Woolies pies the first SA food to use certified sustainable palm oil

Woolworths ready-made, frozen and hot counter pies are the first South African-made food products to be certified by the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO). As part of its Good Business Journey, Woolworths has made a commitment to only source certified sustainable palm oil for their branded products by 2020.



“As far as our food products go, pies use the largest quantities of palm oil, so this is a significant milestone in achieving certified sustainable palm oil across all Woolworths food products,” says Spencer Sonn, managing director of Woolworths Food.

Sustainable palm oil journey

Woolworths started its sustainable palm oil journey in 2011, when it became the first South African retailer to become a member of the RSPO. This is a global non-profit organisation which ensures that the legal, economic, social and environmental impacts of palm oil manufacture are responsibly addressed by maintaining standards for companies throughout the palm oil supply chain. The retailer says that adherence to RSPO standards result in sustainable palm oil production that can reduce additional deforestation, protect endangered wildlife species and lift rural families out of poverty.

Early in 2018, Woolworths launched South Africa's first locally-made, [WBeauty soap range](#) bearing the RSPO certification logo.

Palm oil is a versatile and functional ingredient used in a wide range of food and non-food products. It is also the highest yield per hectare of oil than any other type of quality vegetable oil but is a tropical plant which can only be cultivated along a narrow equatorial band of forest habitat that spans Asia, Africa and South America.



WBeauty range first to bear RSPO sustainable palm oil certification in SA

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Despite palm oil production being a concern for consumers due to its impact on tropical forests, home to iconic Asian species such as the orangutan and tiger, no other retailer in South Africa is a member of the RSPO. Worldwide, Woolworths is one of only seven retailers that qualify to use the RSPO logo through their purchase of certified palm oil certificates for the tonnes of palm oil used in the manufacture of Woolworths' food and beauty products.

Currently, there are 24 South African companies with RSPO membership, and these include Woolworths' suppliers which have joined them on their sustainable palm oil journey.

Driving sustainability in the supply chain

The reason that Woolworths has not looked to alternative oils and rather pursued certified sustainable palm oil is based on the recognition that palm oil trees are the world's most prolific producer of vegetable oil so actually requires the least amount of land per kg of oil than any other vegetable oil. Palm trees on average yield 6 times more oil per hectare than any other oil crop like rapeseed, sunflower or soy.

Because of this, the WWF (World Wide Fund for Nature) and other environmental organisations acknowledge that it is more important to work with communities as well as responsible palm oil producers, and the companies along the supply chain, to drive sustainability throughout the sector.



Palm oil boycott could actually increase deforestation - sustainable products are the solution

Jake Bicknell, Eleanor Slade and Matthew Struebig 19 Nov 2018



"We are deeply concerned about irresponsible palm oil production but boycotting palm oil is not the solution as it will only shift the consumer demand to other types of vegetable oils which could result in far worse environmental or human impacts. As global resource use expands, credible standard and certification schemes like the RSPO can be an important tool to mitigate negative impacts on people and nature," says Tatjana von Bormann, lead of Programmes and Innovation at WWF.

A recent IUCN report (The International Union for Conservation in Nature) states that saying 'No' to palm oil would likely displace, not halt biodiversity loss.

Sonn concludes that Woolworths is delighted to make South Africa's first food products using certified sustainable palm oil. "By taking the lead and addressing the issues in the global palm oil industry head-on, we're giving Woolies' customers the opportunity to be part of a workable global solution."

