

Palm and Vegetable Oils

Sustainability Insights



Product Description

Palm and Vegetable Oils include all edible oils extracted from plant seeds or fruits. Product types include corn oil, cottonseed oil, olive oil, palm and palm kernel oil, peanut (groundnut) oil, rapeseed (canola) oil, rice oil, soybean oil, sunflower oil, safflower oil, avocado oil, walnut oil, margarine, and cooking spray.

Mission

The mission of The Sustainability Consortium (TSC) is to improve the sustainability of products when they are made, purchased, and used, with a focus on manufacturers and the retail buyers who decide what products to carry in stores. The information in this document is drawn from our detailed research on known and potential social and environmental impacts across product life cycles. TSC acknowledges that other issues exist, but we have included here those that are most relevant to the decision making of retail buying teams and manufacturers. The topics are listed alphabetically for ease of reading; the order does not represent prioritization or other criteria.



Managing the Supply Chain

Biodiversity

Certain global pollinator populations, including honey bees, other managed bees, and wild bees, are experiencing increased health and population challenges due to a diverse mix of factors including parasites, pathogens, predators, exposure to crop and bee protection products, habitat loss, lack of nesting sites, poor-quality forage, and queen issues. Growers can help to reduce these impacts by using integrated pest management, planting pollinator habitat on marginal land, and maintaining natural habitat around the farm. Supply chain partners can conduct research on the causes of pollinator decline and invest in prevention and mitigation practices.

Palm Oil

Palm oil production is one of the leading causes of deforestation, which is a significant contributor to climate change. The cultivation of palm oil also impacts climate, land, and water. Improper palm oil production and management can also lead to worker exploitation and threats to worker health and safety. Final product manufacturers should select suppliers that are working to improve sustainability and adopt standard guidelines from the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) or other certifications.

Pesticides

Improper use of pesticides can impact workers and nearby ecosystems and communities. If growers use pesticides, they should read the label and follow usage directions exactly. Workers should be trained and provided with protective gear to prevent exposure to themselves and the environment during handling or application. Consultation with experts can help determine the appropriate selections, forms, timing, and amounts of pesticides for pest problems.

Supply Chain Transparency

Addressing many of the environmental and social challenges within an agriculture supply chain requires cooperation among companies at different stages of the supply chain. Final product manufacturers should determine the locations of farms that produce their supply and engage in initiatives that improve transparency, communication, and data sharing. Suppliers can work together to address common issues, such as energy use, water availability and quality, chemical use, worker health and safety, and labor rights.



Use of Resources

Climate and Energy

Farming and final product manufacturing require significant amounts of energy. The burning of fossil fuels to produce this energy, as well as the production and use of fertilizers, results in greenhouse gas emissions. Growers and final product manufacturers can reduce these impacts by measuring and tracking energy use, performing preventative maintenance on

equipment, and replacing inefficient equipment. Additionally, growers can implement nutrient management plans and use precision agriculture or low-energy irrigation to reduce this impact.

Fertilizer and Nutrients

Improper management and use of fertilizers can lead to local water pollution and release greenhouse gases during production. Growers should use a nutrient management plan to improve the efficiency of fertilizer and manure use for production. Growers can also use precision agriculture, which applies only the amount of fertilizer needed. Where appropriate, growers can plant vegetative buffer zones around streams to help prevent water pollution via nutrient runoff.

Land and Soil

Improper soil management can remove nutrients, release greenhouse gases, and cause soil loss, while clearing land for agriculture can lead to deforestation. Growers should use efficient soil management practices, including reduced soil tilling, when applicable, and other soil erosion prevention measures. Final product manufacturers should use sourcing policies that monitor progress on zero deforestation commitments. Sourcing policies should also promote protection of high conservation value forest habitats, which have unique plants and animals. This reduces the risk of biodiversity loss, diminished ecosystem quality, and increased greenhouse gas emissions that can occur when forests are cleared for agriculture.

Water

Farming and final product manufacturing can use a significant amount of water and contribute to freshwater depletion, which is problematic in water-stressed regions. Growers can measure and track water use and use methods such as precision agriculture, which applies only the amount of water needed, or irrigation water management to improve water efficiency.



Workers and Communities

Community Rights

Local and indigenous people who have traditional rights to land that companies want to develop can be harmed by development that does not consider their rights. Final product manufacturers should work with the local government and community representatives to ensure that traditional rights are respected in land development.

Forced or Child Labor

In some areas, there is a risk of forced or child labor, characterized by actions such as trafficking, withholding wages or documents, and restricting workers to the work site. Manufacturers should determine if and where forced or child labor occurs and work with supply chain partners and experts to address these issues to ensure that all workers have fair working conditions.

Workers

Farm workers, especially women and migrants, may face unfair pay, discrimination, and limited freedoms. They may also be exposed to chemicals, dust, or other hazards. Final product manufacturers can implement programs to ensure that they are sourcing from growers who protect labor rights and ensure the health and safety of their workers.