How to make palm oil without destroying forests

March 4 2015

The versatility of palm oil has led to its use in not just food products but also in everyday goods from lipstick to laundry detergent. But its utility has resulted in the destruction of Southeast Asian rain forests that are the primary source of the oil. An article in *Chemical & Engineering News* (C&EN), the weekly newsmagazine of the American Chemical Society, explores what avenues companies and scientists are taking to produce the oil sustainably.

Alex Scott, a senior editor at C&EN, notes that about 63 million metric tons of palm oil is harvested every year with 87 percent of it coming from Malaysia and Indonesia. According to a 2007 report by the United Nations Environment Programme, the situation has been particularly dire in Indonesia. The country was on track to lose 98 percent of its natural rain forest by 2022 unless it implemented strict conservation measures.

To address this toll, palm oil producers and biotechnology firms are developing multiple strategies. A group of 855 producers called the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil has devised two certification systems to encourage companies to source their oil from sustainable plantations.

On the research front, scientists have been figuring out how to make products similar to palm oil from yeast and algae. Some of these techniques are already being used in specialty products.

More information: Making Palm Oil Sustainable, cen.acs.org/articles/93/i9/Mak … Oil-Sustainable.html

Provided by American Chemical Society