

Belgian Vision – 'Sustainable palm oil as part of the official Belgian policy agenda'

BASP – Belgian Alliance for Sustainable Palm Oil – started its activities in 2012 and now has 16 members, including companies and industry associations. Their common goal is to increase awareness about sustainable palm oil, by setting the example and monitoring the progress made in their respective sectors.

Since December 2015, BASP company members have been using only certified sustainable palm oil in their production for the Belgian market. By 2020, members, under the guidance of BASP, want to go further by including even stricter criteria to protect valuable High Carbon Stock forests & peatlands, and achieve full traceability.

The road towards sustainability is obviously a challenge which goes beyond individual company strategies. It is time to join forces. BASP will continue to facilitate the drive towards sustainability and reaches out to all stakeholders to act together to transform the palm oil supply chain. **In the light of the upcoming elections, we have already suggested some key measures to the future policy makers.**

We are convinced that we can make a difference. Worldwide, forests and agriculture hold more than 30% of the climate change solutions in terms of providing the **most cost-effective forms of mitigation potential**. However, they currently **receive less than 3% of public climate finance**. Neither the Paris Climate Agreement targets nor the Sustainable Development Goals will be reached unless there is a systematic and fundamental transition to different land use models balancing the need to scale up food production for an estimated 9 billion people by 2050 in a better way. At the same time, deforestation and biodiversity loss should be reduced, and climate mitigation and adaptation enhanced.

Meanwhile, the **demand for palm oil continues to increase** within the global vegetable oil sector. Faced with a **continuing strong demand for palm oil**, it is clear that the only way forward is to actively promote sustainable palm oil and convince companies, NGO's and governments to join us in this quest.

We need to take further action. The BASP members understand that it is 5 to 12 on the climate clock and urge that we need to do more. Therefore, it is time for joint action. It is difficult to imagine our world without palm oil. The best alternative to palm oil is sustainable palm oil. Therefore, BASP contributes to transitioning this sector to 100% sustainability. 'Business as usual' is not an option to better balance the need to stimulate economic growth and scale up food production while focusing on achieving climate, biodiversity and ecosystem restoration targets. BASP therefore reaches out to Government and NGOs alike. There is no alternative.

1 BASP members continue their road to sustainable palm oil

BASP will reach out to increase the basis of support. BASP and its members are actively promoting sustainable palm oil to other key stakeholders in Belgium and urge that it's absolutely necessary to convey messages about the inevitability of palm oil and the necessity to transform the consumer market.

BASP members are defending the urgent need to also protect high carbon stock forests on national and international fora, striving for the necessary inclusion of high carbon stock forest protection in the RSPO certification system. Only by doing so, can RSPO turn commitments into specific actions in the field.

The solution will also have to include more efficient use of existing agricultural land as well as prioritizing the use of degraded land (rather than converting primary forests). Supply side action needs to provide the necessary support for smallholders and should include government to government cooperation.

The commitment by BASP members can be translated into a list of efforts to achieve sustainable palm oil goals and convince others to do so as well. This approach is based on the following key guidelines:

- ✓ Monitor sector progress via auto-reporting of figures and additional regular external auditing. Annual reports contribute to efficient and timely reporting of results, with sampling audits confirming these trends and increasing trust from stakeholders and consumers alike.
- ✓ Reach out to other companies to strengthen the basis of support for sustainable palm oil
- ✓ Supporting advanced companies in their transition towards sustainability (information, education, ...)
- ✓ Follow up on scientific and technological evolutions
- ✓ Consumer-oriented communication about sustainable sourcing and the industry roadmap towards sustainability respecting the spirit of this agreement;
- ✓ Focus on the need to transform the market on national and international fora, with the continued ambition of increasing the base to remove hurdles towards sustainability, which can then be audited.



2 An ambitious sustainable palm oil policy for Belgium - How decision makers can help to achieve these ambitious goals

Since it was founded, the BASP is a voluntary sector initiative, based on organizations' shared beliefs that sustainable palm oil is the only way forward. BASP is being recognized by the Belgian sustainable palm oil community (the federal minister, NGO's and official bodies alike) as a credible platform, delivering tangible results. Today, the time has come to officialize these efforts.

Given the global challenges regarding palm oil and the existing BASP initiative in Belgium, we suggest policy makers and pressure groups develop a specific policy for sustainable palm oil.

A. Sectoral agreement

BASP will take the initiative of inviting the different stakeholders to take part in a constructive dialogue on how to continue to move forward towards the use of sustainable palm oil in Belgium. We will do so by defining specific check points, far-reaching engagements and promoting legislative action, financial support or societal endorsement.

B. Public procurement

Our governments can lead by example through buying 100% sustainable palm oil products, defining public procurement standards and sharing this with other public authorities.

C. Development Cooperation

Sustainable palm oil could be a focus in Belgium's development cooperation programs. Supporting producers, particularly smallholders, by guaranteeing continuous access to the Belgian and EU market (gov-ngo cooperation – marginalized producers cannot maintain, let alone improve their production and quality) and local governments (gov-gov cooperation).

3 The EU as frontrunner for sustainable palm oil

The EU should develop policies to assist the transition towards 100% sustainable palm oil in Europe and beyond: total production should raise its levels of sustainability to levels equal or above the definitions as outlined here.

Sustainable palm oil is palm oil that:

- ✓ Does not contribute to deforestation
- ✓ Safeguards biodiversity
- ✓ Preserves peatlands, regardless of their depth
- ✓ Reduces greenhouse gas emissions by following best practices
- ✓ Respects workers' rights as well as local populations and communities, and applies the principle of free, informed and prior consent

Certification is the widest used mechanism to demonstrate compliance to these principles. For the food industry, RSPO is the most widespread certification system.

Specific measures could include:

- ✓ **References in bilateral agreements, whether free-trade or development cooperation agreements.** Production standards should be raised to a sustainable level. We acknowledge current progress. Together, we need to take steps to move towards the equivalent of our standards for all palm oil producing countries.
- ✓ **Local action.** Concrete results on the ground in cooperation with producers (in particular smallholders) and local governments. Recognising local efforts and transforming all production towards sustainability.
- ✓ **Public procurement:** including sustainability of palm oil in public procurement guidelines.
- ✓ **Communication:** the EU could support joint communication, involving all stakeholders, on the positive effects of transitioning to sustainable palm oil.