

## WWF: Expectations and Challenges Facing Colombia with Respect to the RSPO



**Mary Lou Higgins**  
Representative  
WWF Colombia

### KEYWORDS

WWF in Colombia,  
Sustainability of the oil palm sector

First Latin American Meeting of  
the Roundtable on Sustainable  
Palm Oil, RSPO

Cartagena, October 16 -17, 2008.

### Summary

WWF is a non-governmental organisation devoted to conservation which has been working in Colombia since 1964. It is a member of the RSPO and promotes the application of its Principles and Criteria around the world. In Colombia, WWF works in partnership with Fedepalma, Cenipalma and other entities with which it has a mutual interest in geographical areas for, *inter alia*, their biodiversity and for their potential in developing palm oil.



### Global Context

The World Wide Foundation (WWF) is a non-governmental organisation which was created more than forty years ago, and which has a presence in approximately ninety countries. Its mission is to prevent the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to construct a future in which human beings live in harmony with nature. Such a goal can be attained through the conservation of the world's biological biodiversity, ensuring that the use of renewable resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and disproportionate consumption.

In this context, WWF works on a number of productive activities, as it recognises that much of the problem of the loss of biodiversity in the world is related to agricultural and fishing activities, and to the changes in land use and the loss of forests that these activities cause.



By way of an example, Indonesia and Malaysia currently possess 10 million hectares of palm oil plantations, the majority of which has been obtained at the cost of the tropical rainforest.

The conversion of natural ecosystems (not only forests but also savannahs and other ecosystems) is an important source of global greenhouse gas emissions. In Colombia this conversion represents 20% of the country's emissions. This is the first page of the effects of climate change that we are witnessing in this country.

Furthermore, the increase in areas cultivated for palm oil with the purpose of satisfying the demand to create biofuels, can result in moving food production closer to natural areas. These are two conflicting demands which need to be balanced so as not to put at risk either the biodiversity of the country, or the food security of its people.

## WWF and palm oil, a global initiative

Considering the worries expressed in the preceding paragraphs, WWF has promoted a series of initiatives, which began in 2001 with an initiative to prevent the conversion of forests, which seeks to respond to one of the principal causal factors of the conversion of tropical rainforests.

Oil palm and soya were the crops which were taken as a starting point for the reduction of the conversion of forest and other areas of high conservation value, in priority ecological regions.

The idea was to begin to work with the whole productive chain. This is because, even if there is conservation work occurring at a local level, investors are also playing an important role in the process when they decide in which productive sector they wish to invest; such that the strategy has been focused on every scale of the process, from producers to consumers. The scheme promotes:

- Better land use practices;
- Land identification with the participation and identification of areas with high conservation value, including their cultural aspects;
- Filters for investors. This aspect has been worked on with different banks, so that they establish filters

and revise the selection criteria of their palm oil and soya investors;

- Dialogue between the interested parties within the oil palm and soil sectors. For this reason WWF is a founding member of the RSPO and of the Round Table on Responsible Soya (RTRS).

## WWF in the context of Colombian palm oil

In particular, in Colombia there is an overlap between the priority ecological regions for WWF and the areas of projected or actual palm oil cultivation. As a result, the geographical interests of the oil palm producers and of the WWF coincide. In the Figure 1, in the map on the left below, one can identify the zones in which WWF works (the Pacific Coast, Orinoco, the Amazon and the Andean region). On the right, one can see an indication of the potential expansion of palm oil, which is big in the very same areas. As a result, it is important that WWF and investors in the oil palm sector can enter into dialogue about the production and conservation interests of both parties.

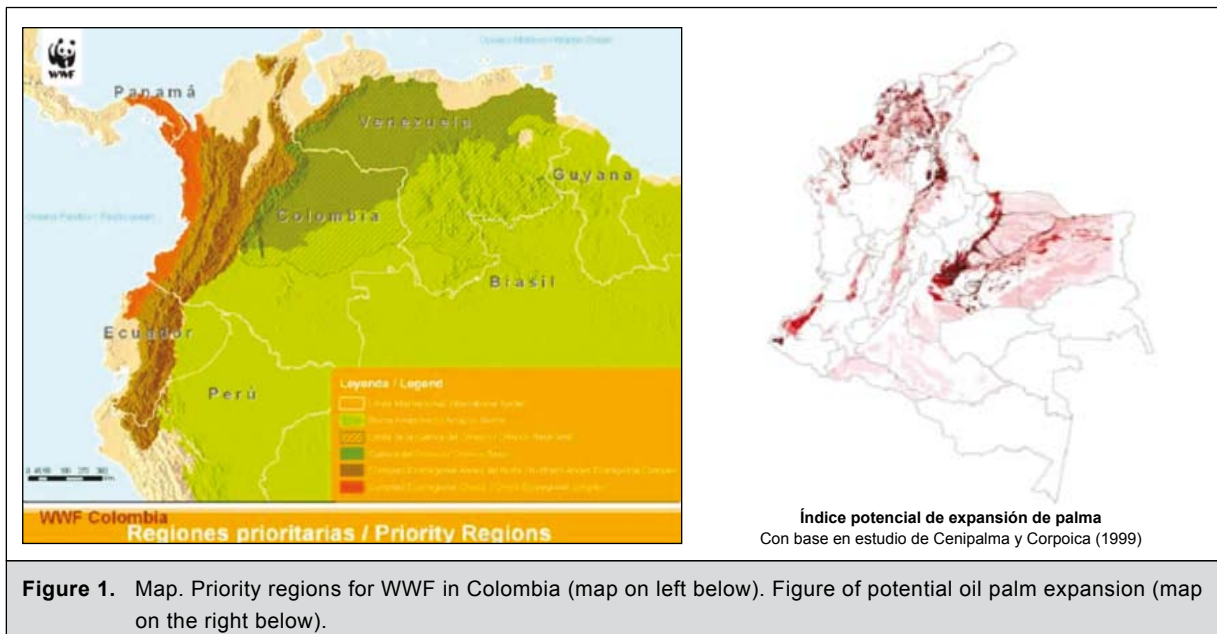
The most serious considerations in this respect have to do with the prevention of conflicts over land, so as to avoid repeating cases like those of Curvaradó and Jiguamiandó in Urabá province, Tumaco and south of Bolívar, amongst others, and also to avoid the displacement of peasant and ethnic communities.

For this to occur, it is indispensable that palm oil projects on common lands are based on an adequate prior consultation and on an analysis of their viability, and that they offer decent labor and social conditions to the small producers.

The planned expansion of oil palm plantations should meet criteria of land identification, and the protection of areas of high conservation value.

As I mentioned earlier, special attention should be paid to the growing demand for palm oil for biofuels, as this may:

- Generate incentives for the expansion of palm oil cultivation towards natural ecosystems of high conservation value (zones in the Pacific like Guapi; natural savannahs like those of Orinoquia;



**Figure 1.** Map. Priority regions for WWF in Colombia (map on left below). Figure of potential oil palm expansion (map on the right below).

- (Urabá, etc.) which do not only refer to forests, but also to other systems of equal importance;
- Contribute to the scarcity, or increase in price, of foodstuffs, in national, regional and local contexts;
- Opening up the agricultural frontier to biofuel production could displace the areas for food production towards areas of high conservation value.

These are the threats. But Colombia has big opportunities in this respect, and also within the region. Its palm oil enjoys comparative advantages and the sector has also already seen the negative experiences associated with expansion in other regions, such that the sector should follow the sustainable development model of this sector that the other regions, and other biofuels, have not followed. The sustainable route is a key factor in attaining competitiveness too.

## How does WWF hope to contribute in Colombia

It is certain that there are shared interests in terms of land, but these also exist in the search for options which truly generate sustainability for biodiversity, people and the profitability of the oil palm sector. As a result, WWF contributes in Colombia to work in this field of production when:

- It combines key actors (Fedepalma, Cenipalma, the Alexander von Humboldt Institute);
- It generates debate and transparent dialogue. In this instance the National Interpretation of the Principles and Criteria of the RSPO reflects this;
- It contributes to the methodological development of land identification measures, related to the areas of high conservation value, especially with regard to Principles 5 and 7;
- It gives special attention to the analysis and consideration of priority areas.
- It promotes better practices and their presence in markets. To this end it works on the possibilities of certification. One example of this promotion is that which Migros of Switzerland, and Sainsbury's in England, have undertaken, in which they declare some principles and clear criteria in terms of responsibility when they buy their agricultural products, and open their markets to those producers who follow them. This is already occurring in Colombia.
- It works to identify the areas of high conservation value (AVC, in Spanish). WWF considers this to be a key tool in the territorial planning of sectors such as the palm oil sector, at different levels. One example of this is precisely the project which WWF is working on with Igac, Ideam and



Cenipalma, and one to which the Alexander von Humboldt also contributes technical support. The attempt here is to obtain a methodology for the identification of areas of high environmental, social and cultural sensitivity in an attempt to bring up-to-date the map of areas which are apt for, and which have restrictions to, the cultivation of palm oil in Colombia.

This methodology will be converted into a navigation map for the expansion of the palm oil sector and also for other productive sectors too.

The same criteria are established in an international process and are worked on at a different level. For example, in a joint initiative between the Ministries of Environment, Water and Territorial Development, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, areas of high conservation value in the North-West of Ecuador, on the border with Colombia, are being identified, in such a way that some environmental proposals in oil palm areas on the border of the neighbouring country can be adopted.

## Expectations following the adoption of the Principles and Criteria

The expectations that WWF has with respect to the adoption of the Principles and Criteria of the RSPO can be summed up as follows:

- The clarification of the legal situation of ownership and use of land of all the oil palm producers of the country. This without doubt helps to avoid territorial, social and environmental conflicts. These are few, in reality, but can generate great difficulties.
- To extend to other natural ecosystems the policy of non-conversion of natural forest adopted by the oil palm sector, and to generate a higher level of commitment on its part to achieving this.
- To broaden the culture of transparency, information management, monitoring and evaluation, and constant improvement in the Colombian oil palm sector. It is certain that this exists, but the idea is that this be extended to more actors from the private sector, from communities, and government...
- To consolidate better practices amongst small producers, with the support of the oil palm sector and its business leaders, in environmental, productive and social management.
- To make arrangements in the countryside that blend the oil palm agro-ecosystems into their surrounding natural areas.
- To improve the labor and social conditions of the small producers, the oil palm workers and the local communities in the oil palm regions of the country.
- To implement more practices and policies of responsible purchase in both national and international markets.

## Goals in the adoption of the Principles and Criteria

The goals of WWF in the adoption of the Principles and Criteria of the RSPO can be resumed as follows:

- To generate a national demand for palm oil certified by the RSPO. This means making an effort to change the impression that this certification is exclusively for the international market. In this respect, Colombian food, cosmetics, and biodiesel businesses should work to achieve this aim;
- To develop support tools and processes to encourage the necessary knowledge transfer to allow large and small palm oil producers to have access to certification programmes;
- To make progress in the elaboration of protocols which permit the analysis, evaluation and certification of traceability of the certified palm oil across the full extent of the different stages of the productive chain;
- To achieve a cross-over between the Colombian biofuel certification initiatives and the construction of a map of areas apt for, and with restrictions to, the cultivation of palm oil in Colombia;
- To encourage the adoption of the Principles and Criteria of the RSPO, not as a prerequisite to obtaining certification but rather as a key tool for the management and ongoing improvement of the oil palm sector;

- To ensure that the credits and incentives that the Government offers to the oil palm sector are made subject to the fulfilment of environmental, social, productive and environmental standards, such as those of the RSPO;
- To contribute to a process whereby the policy proposals of the Government, and the programmes of alternative development, count on the same criteria of environmental and social sustainability, and that they maintain the correct balance between productive activities.