

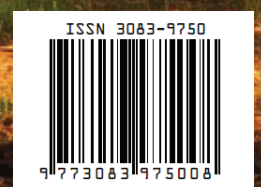
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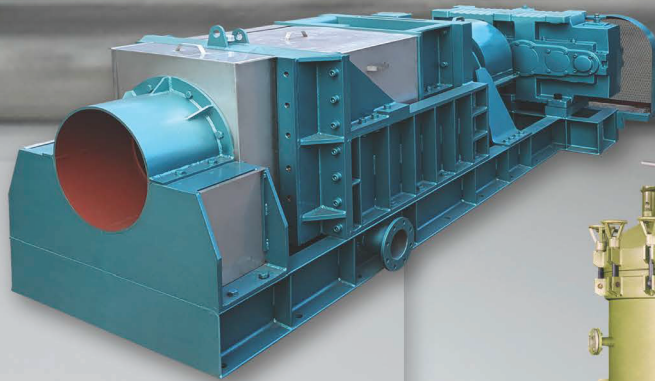
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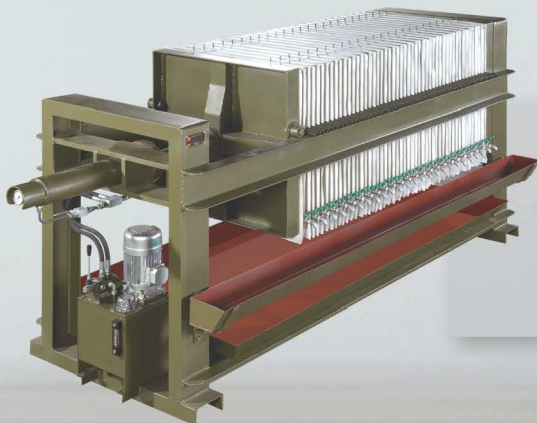
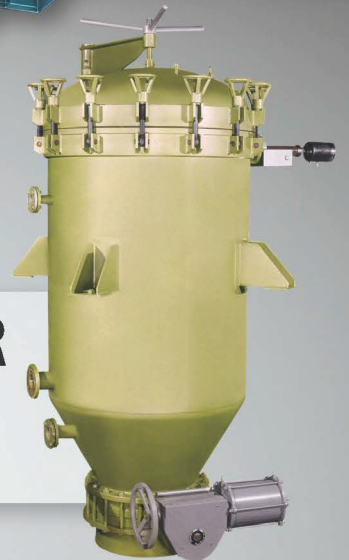
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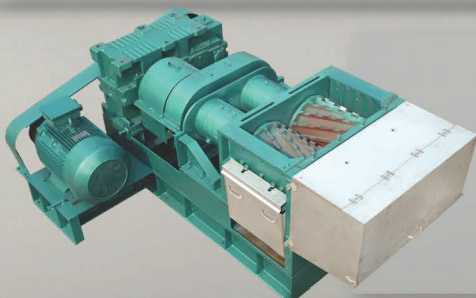
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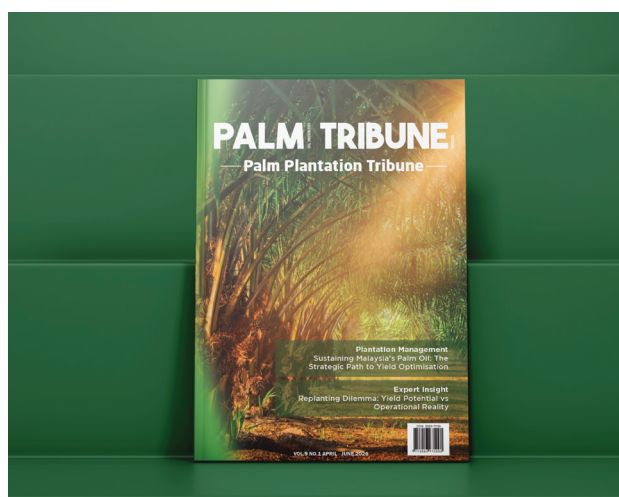
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CONTENTS

5-7

Latest News Roundup

A quick digest of the latest policies and market trends.

9-13

Knowledge Nugget

When Sustainability Speaks in Tongues, Wears Costumes and Forgets the Mud Part 1

9-13

Expert Insight

Replanting Dilemma: Yield Potential vs Operational Reality

16-19

Knowledge Nugget

When Sustainability Speaks in Tongues, Wears Costumes and Forgets the Mud Part 2

20-22

IPM Insights

If I Were a Rat, I'd Thank the Estate

20-22

Plantation Management

Sustaining Malaysia's Palm Oil: The Strategic Path to Yield Optimisation

25

Oil Palm Ministries, Its Agencies And Related Associations in Malaysia and Indonesia

36

Event List 2026

ADVERTISERS INDEX

1, 2, & 8

Muar Ban Lee Group Berhad

14

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Back Cover

Next Chapter Media



MPOGCF - Oil Palm Plantation and Biodiversity Conservation Can Go Hand in Hand

4 February 2026

The narrative around oil palm plantations and wildlife in Malaysia may be shifting.

According to Hairulazim Mahmud, general manager of the Malaysian Palm Oil Green Conservation Foundation (MPOGCF), oil palm landscapes do not necessarily threaten wildlife such as the orangutan - a claim often highlighted by international critics. Scientific observations suggest that orangutans are adapting to plantation environments, using them as movement corridors, building nests and foraging within them, particularly in Sabah, where drone and helicopter surveys have documented their presence. These findings challenge broad assertions that palm oil development automatically spells habitat destruction.

Similar patterns emerge with elephants, which enter plantations during replanting seasons to feed on young shoots. Plantation operators now work closely with authorities to manage wildlife interactions ethically. MPOGCF also collaborates with organisations like the Earthworm Foundation to equip smallholders with technologies such as drones to predict and mitigate human-wildlife conflict.

Highlighting conservation efforts, Hairulazim pointed to initiatives like the Lower Kawag Orangutan Habitat Restoration Project in Sabah and forest-connecting work under the Central Forest Spine programme in Kelantan. Malaysia's oil palm sector, now regulated by over 60 laws and mandatory sustainability standards like MSPO - aligned with the EU's deforestation rules.



Driving oil palm smallholders to adopt regenerative agriculture

22 January 2026

As global demand for sustainable palm oil grows, independent smallholders in Malaysia are being encouraged to go beyond conventional certification and embrace regenerative agriculture to boost profitability, protect biodiversity and enhance carbon sequestration, says Wild Asia founder Reza Azmi. While many smallholders already comply with sustainability standards like the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), buyers today demand detailed traceability and responsible production practices that certification alone can't fully guarantee.

Wild Asia's Wild Asia Group Scheme (WAGS) supports smallholders with technical assistance and training to meet international standards and improve farming practices. Its WAGS Bio programme emphasises soil health, natural pest resistance and reduced reliance on chemical inputs - strengthening palms while cutting costs and greenhouse gas emissions. Some participating farms under these regenerative systems have recorded significantly higher profits than conventional plots.

The article highlights that regenerative methods, which include making bio enzymes, aerated compost and natural fertilisers on-farm, can lower costs and enhance sustainability. Traceable palm oil produced under WAGS can meet global market expectations and align with emerging policies on "no deforestation, no peat and no exploitation (NDPE)".





Malaysia's 2026 CPO output to moderate after record-breaking 2025 - MPOB

13 January 2026

Malaysia's palm oil sector - long a pillar of the rural economy and a key global supplier — is set for a slight production moderation in 2026 after a record output in 2025. According to the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB), crude palm oil (CPO) production is forecast to dip below the 20 million-tonne mark this year, with estimates ranging between 19.5 million and 19.8 million tonnes, reflecting a natural “tree-resting” cycle following strong yields late last year. This moderation marks a return toward normalcy rather than a structural decline.

The output adjustment is also influenced by ageing palms, ongoing replanting and persistent labour constraints, which temporarily reduce effective harvesting areas. Additionally, weather risks such as monsoon-related waterlogging could disrupt field operations and delay fresh fruit bunch deliveries.

Despite the slightly lower domestic production forecast, Malaysia's CPO exports are expected to rebound in 2026, with shipments projected between 15.8 million and 16.8 million tonnes. Indonesia's expanding biodiesel mandates (B35–B40) are likely to reduce its exportable supply, creating opportunities for Malaysia to fill market gaps - particularly in India, China, the EU and other regions.

The overall outlook paints a balanced picture: a modest production adjustment as part of plantation cycles, complemented by resilient export demand and strategic positioning in global markets.



Govt combats palm oil discrimination with tailored approach - Minister

20 January 2026

The Malaysian government is stepping up its efforts to tackle discrimination against its palm oil industry abroad with a proactive and tailored trade diplomacy strategy. Datuk Seri Dr Noraini Ahmad, Minister of Plantation and Commodities, outlined a multifaceted plan in Parliament that centres on aligning Malaysian palm oil products with global market expectations, strengthening standards compliance, and boosting export performance.

Key to this approach is compliance with international norms, especially through the enhanced MSPO 2.0 certification, which ensures sustainable palm oil meets rigorous environmental and social criteria. By pushing for value-added products and premium markets, the ministry aims to elevate Malaysia's palm oil profile beyond bulk commodity exports.

Market diversification is another cornerstone, reducing over-reliance on traditional buyers like India, China, and the European Union. In 2025, emerging regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, North Africa, and ASEAN accounted for half of Malaysia's palm oil exports, a notable increase from previous years.

Malaysia is also strengthening industry links abroad. The launch of the Palm Oil Research and Technical Service Institute (PORTSIM) in Shanghai supports innovation, technology transfer and broader use of palm derivatives.



Youth and palm oil: From Sembang Sawit to sparks

5 October 2026

In a spirited celebration of youth engagement and the future of Malaysia's oil palm industry, the

#MyPalmPride initiative brought together young advocates, industry leaders and educators at the Sembang Sawit forum to ignite fresh ideas and passion around sustainable palm oil. The event - a rare convergence of youthful energy and agricultural heritage - showcased how young voices can energise traditional sectors with innovation, dialogue and purpose.

Speakers included YB Dato' Prof. Dr Ahmad bin Ibrahim,,Dr Sean Labansing, Dr Gideon Tan and Joseph Tek challenged young participants to rethink palm oil beyond commodity stereotypes and explore its multi-faceted roles in the economy, sustainability and global food systems. Their talks emphasised that the sector's future depends not just on plantations and mills, but on the next generation's creativity and commitment to sustainable practice.

Veteran voices like Tan Sri Emeritus Professor Datuk Dr Augustine S.H. Ong - regarded as a father figure in Malaysian palm oil - and MR Chandran shared context and wisdom that linked the industry's evolution to broader societal goals.

The gathering also spotlighted youth leaders showing that mentorship and empowerment can turn "sembang sawit" (palm oil chatter) into sparks that light the way forward.



Malaysia's Palm Oil Sector Resilient Amid Global Fertiliser Crisis

3 April 2026

The current geopolitical instability in West Asia, specifically the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, has positioned Malaysia's palm oil sector as a structurally resilient cornerstone of the global edible oils market. While global agriculture grapples with severe nitrogen-based fertiliser shortages, the oil palm's unique physiological requirements offer a strategic buffer. Unlike short-term food crops sensitive to nitrogen fluctuations, oil palm is predominantly reliant on potash, thereby insulating production from the volatility seen in nitrogen pricing.

The sector's robustness is further reinforced by established procurement strategies, as large-scale producers typically secure up to 70% of fertiliser requirements through forward contracts. This pre-emptive acquisition mitigates the impact of sudden price spikes, ensuring operational continuity despite intensifying dynamics in supply chain logistics. Furthermore, the inherent biological lag means that current fertiliser reductions would take two years to manifest in yield declines, preventing an immediate collapse in output.

Consequently, Malaysia is poised to leverage this stability to capture a larger share of the global trade, boosting export revenue. Amidst market fragmentation, palm oil serves as a critical stabilising force and a strategic diesel substitute.





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When Sustainability Speaks in Tongues, Wears Costumes and Forgets the Mud

Palm Oil, Penance and Paradox (Part 1)

By Joseph Tek Choon Yee



A Crop Turned Confessional

Palm oil is no longer debated like a crop. It is debated like a sin.

Somewhere along the global supply chain, a quiet, efficient tropical tree has been dragged into a moral courtroom it never asked to enter. In this courtroom, guilt is allocated with surprising confidence, absolution is packaged in neat logos, and the loudest voices often belong to those who have never set foot in a flooded harvesting path or listened to a mill boiler groan past midnight.

I am not here to argue that sustainability does not matter. It does - deeply. The planet is not a political slogan; it is our shared home. The forest is not a marketing prop; it is a living system. Human rights are not a brand strategy; they are human dignity.

But the palm oil sustainability debate has become more than a struggle for better practices. It has become an arena of contradictions, competing agendas, unequal burdens, and - too often - a theatre where performance replaces progress. It is also a Babel, where stakeholders speak in different tongues, nod politely, and then leave the room convinced the other side is either naïve or manipulative.

And then there is the paradox - the most corrosive one of all - when the same brands that sit at the table of certified sustainable palm oil quietly sell products screaming "No Palm Oil," as if virtue can be achieved by exclusion rather than improvement.

This is a story about that debate. Not as a neat academic paper, but as a lived experience. A story of mud and metrics, of craft beer and cold peanuts, of certificates and cynicism, of genuine reform and opportunistic green theatre. It is the story of how sustainability, when done without fairness and empathy, can turn from green to grey.

The Gospel According to the Green North

In the palm oil debate, contradictions sprout like weeds after rain, and the most stubborn of these is the West–East divide. The irony is pungent. The Global North, which cleared its forests long ago in the march of empire, industrialisation and comfort, now steps forward as high priest of ecological morality, wagging fingers at the Global South for using what little land it still has.

It is like the guest who emptied the buffet at lunch and then lectures the host at dinner about portion control. Or the neighbour who felled his orchard to build a mansion and pool, then scolds you for planting durians in your yard. Once, a Western NGO member admitted - almost guiltily - “Who are we in the West to lecture the East for eking a living from deforestation, when we stripped our own lands bare long before ‘sustainability’ was even a word?” It was a rare flicker of honesty, too often drowned out by polished presentations and pious hashtags.

The truth is that the North and South often stand on different rungs of Maslow’s ladder. The North, perched higher, debates ideals, identities, and philosophical purity. Much of the South still grapples with job security, survival, and dignity. When you stand on different steps of the ladder, it is no surprise you see different horizons.

This is why the UN principle of “**common but differentiated responsibility**” matters. In plain English, everyone should help clean the house, but those who made the biggest mess should not scold the rest for holding the broom wrongly. The poor, who only dirtied a corner of the rug, cannot be expected to scrub the entire floor while the rich polish their silverware.

Of Craft Beer and Cold Peanuts

In conference halls, Western sustainability executives sip craft beer while deciding the fate of communities thousands of miles away. Meanwhile, in Kalimantan and other frontier regions, there are families uncertain not only of their next meal, but of their dignity. For them, palm oil is not “controversial.” It is survival.

That is why some planters speak with anger. I once heard a senior planter roar at a conference: “**Crop apartheid!**” Another muttered: “**Neo-colonialism.**” These words can sound dramatic to outsiders, but to those who feel trapped in a tilted system, anger is not performance; it is evidence of lived strain.

Then there is the perversity of optics. NGO leaders glide into producer countries on business-class tickets while the planters they audit are wedged into economy. Both fly to the same plantations, yet clearly not on the same journey. One lands to champagne and hot towels, the other to cramped knees and cold peanuts.

And somehow, it is the latter who gets lectured about privilege.





The Theatre of the Green

Sustainability standards, traceability requirements, and new regulations are often presented as moral progress, and in many ways they are. Yet for much of the producing world, they also feel like protectionism wrapped in green robes. The frustration is not that standards exist. The frustration is that burdens are uneven, goalposts keep shifting, and the rewards rarely match the costs.

In this grand stage play, every actor performs. Some perform out of conviction. Others perform for careers, fees, reputation, and funding cycles. Scripts differ, costumes vary, but at day's end, many still queue at the same canteen for supper.

Plantation folklore captures the absurdities best. The VIP's pristine white sneakers are ruined within minutes of a walkabout. The mechanisation guru proposes a massive harvester for muddy paths that would swallow it whole. The academic demands tablets in areas with no internet. The donor funds a "biodiversity corridor" that becomes a rubbish dump. The bureaucrat insists estate drains be covered, only to hear the estate manager reply, dry as old fronds: "Sir, they are for water, not pedestrians."

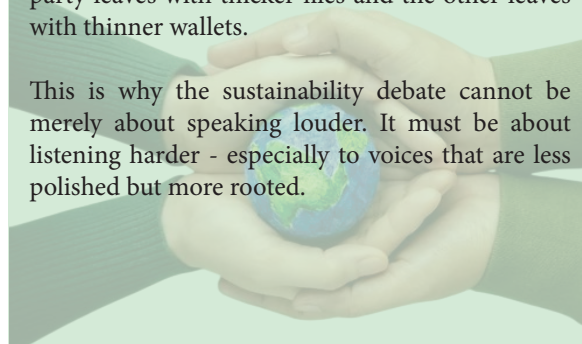
When sustainability becomes a performance, the danger is that it rewards optics over outcomes, paperwork over practice, and eloquence over insight.

When Eloquence Outshouts Insight

One uncomfortable truth in global debates is that those who speak confidently are often treated as those who understand most. Eloquence becomes a substitute for expertise. Fluency becomes a proxy for wisdom. Cultures that value reflection over rhetoric appear hesitant beside those fluent in persuasion. Yet silence is not ignorance, and confidence is not correctness.

In many Asian settings, politeness adds another twist. Planters and managers will sit through jargon-laden sermons, nodding graciously even as acronyms whirl overhead like low-flying aircraft. Better to look agreeable than to interrupt. But too many nods can turn into lopsided deals, where one party leaves with thicker files and the other leaves with thinner wallets.

This is why the sustainability debate cannot be merely about speaking louder. It must be about listening harder - especially to voices that are less polished but more rooted.





Not Saints, Not Villains

In this saga, growers are too often cast as pantomime villains. Yes, some have cut corners. Like any industry, there are wrongdoers who deserve scrutiny and consequences. But do not tar the entire sector.

Most growers are not saints, but neither are they the cartoon villains splashed across NGO brochures. They are ordinary people managing extraordinary complexity: crop biology, labour realities, pests and diseases, floods and droughts, market swings, and an expanding universe of compliance demands.

Scrutiny is fair. Recognition must follow. Otherwise, we punish the very hands that harvest fruit, keep the industry alive, and help feed the world.

Sustainability must have the courage to be balanced: tough on wrongdoing, but honest about progress.

The Business of Being Green

Opportunists appear in every corner of the sustainability arena. In boardrooms, some nod through meetings rather than exercise stewardship. In NGOs, some chase grants faster than impact. In trading houses, some perfect dashboards while neglecting the supply chains behind them. On conference stages, some speak with volume that substitutes for depth.

Sustainability is too vital to become performance art. The planet does not care about slogans. Communities do not eat acronyms. Forests do not regrow because a report was published.

A touch of humour and humility may serve the planet better than posturing ever could. Perhaps the real test of “green” lies not in banners and spotlights, but in the quiet work done after the applause fades.



The Green Double Standard and the Soy Blind Spot

The contradictions deepen when you compare scrutiny across crops.

As Brazil gears up for yet another record soy harvest, bulldozers continue their slow march through the Amazon and Cerrado. Yet global outrage remains muted. Soy glides under the banner of “feeding the world,” reinforced by powerful lobbies and political goodwill. Unlike palm, much soy production still operates with minimal traceability or mandatory sustainability commitments.

The spotlight on palm is forensic; the spotlight on soy is forgiving.

This imbalance is not merely unfair. It is counterproductive. Palm oil is the world’s most land-efficient major vegetable oil. Producing more oil on less land should be a sustainability virtue, not a stigma. As a perennial crop, oil palm protects soil structure and reduces carbon loss associated with repeated tillage. If the world replaced palm oil with less efficient oils, global land demand would balloon, pushing deforestation elsewhere and multiplying emissions - the very outcome sustainability claims to prevent.

If sustainability is to mean anything, it must be universal, guided by evidence rather than emotion. Otherwise, what we call global justice becomes global theatre - applause reserved for those with better scripts.



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The Replanting Dilemma: Yield Potential vs. Operational Reality

Edited by Zahidah Zahidi

Source from: Julian McGill, Managing Director of Glenauk Economics at the MPOB Palm Oil Economic Review & Outlook (R&O) Seminar 2026

Replanting is a critical component of long-term estate management in the palm oil industry. Dr. Julian McGill, Managing Director of Glenauk Economics, challenged the conventional wisdom that replanting is merely an agronomic necessity. Instead, he framed it as a high-stakes economic calculation where the “break-even” point is higher than many realise.

Height, Not Just Yield

The primary problem with ageing palms is not necessarily a sudden collapse in yield, but rather their physical stature. Once palms exceed 13 meters, harvesting becomes exponentially more difficult and dangerous. This height barrier, combined with poor palm stands, due to damage or death over a 25-year cycle, reduces the effective density of the field.

The Economic Model

However, replanting also temporarily reduces production. While newer varieties reach their first economic yield approximately 24 months after planting, estates must absorb years of maintenance costs without peak output. Economic modelling by Glenauk Economics examined potential returns based on projected profits from replanted areas. Their analysis assumed a conservative cost of MYR 22,500 per hectare to cover replanting and maintenance until maturity, along with a modest annual cost inflation of 2%. The model also assumed crude palm oil (CPO) prices of MYR 4,000 per tonne and palm kernel (PK) prices of MYR 2,000 per tonne in real terms, with export taxes, corporate taxes and the windfall profit levy remaining unchanged.

Malaysian growers need to be confident they can achieve an average Fresh Fruit Bunch (FFB) yield of at least 20 tonnes per hectare to ensure an economic return on

How Do Growers Decide to Replant

In 2025, Malaysia saw a surge in replanting rates, particularly in Sabah, where roughly 4% of the planted area was turned over. Data from the Malaysian Palm Oil Board (MPOB) suggests that estates tend to postpone replanting during both price “peaks” (to capture immediate cash flow) and “troughs” (to preserve capital). Estates are catching up on backlogs as prices stabilise off their recent highs.

The Window for Strategic Redesign

Replanting offers a rare opportunity to “future-proof” the estate. Beyond simply introducing higher-yielding seeds, it allows companies to use satellite technology for optimal spacing and, crucially, to lay out fields in a way that accommodates future mechanisation.



Labour Availability and Management

However, McGill argued that low replanting rates are often a symptom rather than a cause of the industry’s woes. Structural issues with labour supply need to be solved before low-yielding growers will be confident to invest in replanting. Without a stable workforce to ensure high-quality harvesting, the high capital outlay of RM22,500/ha becomes a risk many boardrooms are hesitant to take.

When Sustainability Speaks in Tongues, Wears Costumes and Forgets the Mud

Palm Oil, Penance and Paradox (Part 2)

By Joseph Tek Choon Yee



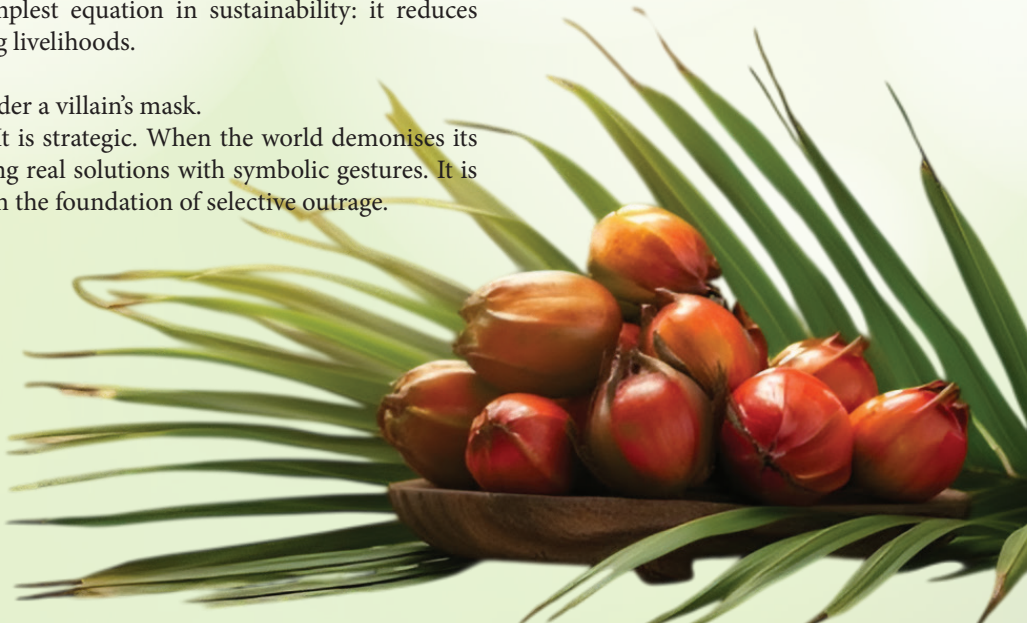
One Tree, Many Lives

Few crops serve humanity as broadly as the oil palm. Often described through the “4Fs” - food, feed, fibre and fuel - this single tree sustains kitchens, industries and communities across the world. Its derivatives show up in infant formula and frying pans, soaps and shampoos, oleochemicals and bioenergy, bioplastics and pharmaceuticals.

Per hectare, it is unmatched in productivity. Its best estates already achieve yields that other oil crops can only envy, and science continues to push the ceiling higher. More yield from less land is the simplest equation in sustainability: it reduces pressure on forests while strengthening livelihoods.

And yet, the palm remains trapped under a villain's mask.

The tragedy is not only reputational. It is strategic. When the world demonises its most efficient oil crop, it risks replacing real solutions with symbolic gestures. It is difficult to build a sustainable future on the foundation of selective outrage.





Babel: Two Languages, One Industry

If the global hypocrisy is one fault line, the internal language gap is another.

Put an old oil palm planter in muddy boots at the same table as other stakeholders in shiny shoes, and you have more comedy than conversation. The planter speaks in rainfall, yields, fertiliser rates, harvest rounds and pests. The other side speaks in Scope 3, ESG metrics, blended finance, profit guidance and dividend payout. Both smile politely over kopi, quietly wondering, “What on earth did he just say?”

This is the sustainability Babel. It has existed for decades, but today it feels wider than ever because the world of sustainability has become an empire of acronyms.

Planters live in a world where the weather can ruin best-laid plans. Non-planters live in a world where a disclosure template can determine capital flows. Analysts measure health by earnings per share. Planters measure health by bunch weight per hectare and whether the harvesters turned up.

Both talk about “yield,” but one means per hectare, the other means per share.

The Rise of the Translators

In the middle of this Babel stands an overlooked group: internal sustainability teams - the translators.

Their job is thankless and essential. They turn PowerPoint ESG sermons into planter-speak and planter wisdom into boardroom logic. They decode Brussels into Bahasa Ladang. They sit through a session on Scope 3 disclosures and later explain to an estate manager: “Boss, it means we must reduce emissions and prove it, or the EU won’t buy.”

This translator class has quietly reshaped the sector. It is one reason palm oil has moved faster than many other commodities in implementing sustainability systems. Over the years, palm sustainability professionals have even spilled into other sectors - banking, insurance, FMCG, aviation - bringing with them the tough, field-tested discipline of turning ideals into operational action.

In that sense, palm oil’s sustainability talent has become one of its biggest exports.



When Green Turns Grey: The “No Palm Oil” Paradox

If the first hypocrisy is global, and the second is linguistic, the third is the one that insults intelligence.

Some brands sit at the same table as certified sustainable palm oil stakeholders, endorse the principles, enjoy the association, and then proudly sell products labelled “No Palm Oil.” It is green theatre with double scripts: one for the conference, one for the supermarket shelf.

When a shampoo bottle boasts “No Palm Oil,” it is not making a scientific statement. It is making a marketing statement. It is selling moral panic in a jar.

The effect is corrosive. It turns sustainability from a shared improvement journey into exclusion and fear. It signals to consumers that palm oil, even when certified, is still something to be ashamed of.

And it triggers the obvious question: if certified palm oil earns no market reward, why should producers bear the cost of doing better?

Sustainability cannot be a producer’s penance alone. It must be a shared responsibility from plantation to product shelf. If certified oil is never defended, only demanded, then the whole model becomes a moral performance rather than a practical solution.

Even worse, “No Palm Oil” can expand the global footprint. Substitute oils require more land per litre. Replacing palm globally would likely mean clearing millions more hectares - precisely the outcome sustainability claims to prevent.

The label may sell soap. It cleans no conscience.

When Dialects Collide: Comedy with Consequences

The dialect clashes are often funny, until you see the costs.

A consultant announces the need for carbon removal projects in the supply chain. The planter hears another gimmick and wonders if it will solve labour shortages. A fund manager declares the need to unlock value through ecosystem collaboration. The planter imagines sharing fertiliser with a neighbour. An analyst asks whether dividends will rise in line with crude palm oil prices, and the planter thinks: it depends on whether workers show up, whether fields flood, whether the mill survives another mechanical breakdown.

And when someone says “stakeholder engagement,” the planter imagines a long afternoon of lukewarm coffee and another workshop, while the fruit is still ripening, unharvested, and unforgiving.

Frameworks do not harvest fruit bunches. Harvesters do. A slide deck cannot cut a ripe bunch. A compliance report cannot repair a washed-out bridge.

The plantation lives and dies by mud, not models.

The Missing Mud and the One-Way Mirror

Here lies one of the biggest unspoken resentments. Much of sustainability compliance feels like a one-way mirror.

Growers are asked for disclosures, audits, traceability and transparency. They pay compliance costs. They adopt NDPE policies. They map supply bases. They improve grievance systems. They invest in training and data.

But the same level of transparency is rarely reciprocated downstream. If sustainability is truly shared responsibility, then openness must be mutual. Otherwise, producers feel that they are “sleeping in the same bed” with stakeholders who are dreaming of squeezing more value out of the same fruit, while leaving producers to absorb the costs.

And here is another irony. After years of costly compliance, many growers discover that premiums are modest and demand is inconsistent. Yet non-certified oil still finds buyers. The system becomes difficult to exit. The reputational rewards accumulate downstream - where brands wear sustainability like a marketing badge - while growers are told to be grateful for being allowed to sell.

This is not partnership. It is hierarchy disguised as collaboration.



From Defensive Diplomacy to Producer Solidarity

At some point, producers must ask a hard question: if critics are united, why are we fragmented?

Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Papua New Guinea and other producers share more than geography. They share a destiny. They feed the world, yet are too often fed to the wolves of perception.

Despite progress, the palm oil story remains fractured, lost in translation and tone. What the moment demands is cohesion: shared research, harmonised certification recognition, and a more confident collective voice through platforms like the CPOPC and beyond.

Imagine MSPO, ISPO, and other regional standards aligned under mutual recognition, grounded in science and fairness - a One Tropic Standard that speaks clearly, consistently, and credibly. That would not be propaganda. That would be narrative discipline.

Because the sustainability debate is not only about oil. It is about identity. It is about the Global South's right to progress with purpose, to grow responsibly rather than apologetically. True sustainability is not submission to imported virtue. It is stewardship of what we hold in trust: land, labour, and legacy.

Stubborn Hope and the Quiet Covenant

Friends may call me naïve. I call it stubborn hope.

It is the conviction that beneath the noise of boardrooms and campaigns, there are still people who truly care - not for quarterly applause, not for the theatre of pseudo advocacy, but for the real future of an industry that feeds millions and sustains livelihoods.

Without such conviction, sustainability becomes a costume change: impressive on stage, forgotten backstage. Real sustainability cannot be staged; it must be lived and led.

What the world needs is not another sermon of slogans but a renewed covenant - one that unites growth with stewardship, inclusivity with innovation, and objectivity with honesty. Palm oil, done right, remains among the most efficient and scalable tropical edible oils to nourish a growing world.

But it will take courage: the courage to balance ideals with pragmatism, and the courage to ensure that sustainability is not merely a moral claim, but a measurable legacy.

When the Spotlight Fades

In the end, sustainability is not a slogan. It is a mirror reflecting who we are when the campaigns end and the cameras stop rolling.

The real test begins when no one is watching.

When the spotlight fades and applause dies down, what remains is character. Were we building systems that protect forests and dignity, or were we performing for audiences who reward the neatest story?

Sustainability is not a role to be acted. It is a responsibility to be lived - quietly, steadfastly, and with courage.

Because integrity, unlike applause, must echo long after the curtain falls.

If I Were a Rat, I'd Thank the Estate

By Joseph Tek Choon Yee

If I were a rat in an oil palm estate, I would wake before dawn - earlier than the field bell, earlier than the muster, earlier even than the estate manager checking WhatsApp as if yield can be improved by scrolling.

By the time the kopi is poured, I would already be at work.

I am **Rattus tiomanicus** - the Malayan wood rat. Arboreal, adaptable and, frankly, much misunderstood. You call me a pest. I prefer “**an unofficial harvester with poor ethics**”.

From the office, the estate looks orderly: palm trees in rows, roads in lines, yields in tables, budgets in files. From the ground, however, it looks like something else entirely - food, cover and opportunity arranged with impressive human efficiency.

Loose fruits are breakfast. Frond piles are playgrounds. Unpruned palms are living condominiums. Neglected line-sides are not untidy to me. They are prime property.



Rattus tiomanicus - the Malayan wood rat

You count me by hectare. I count you by habit. And when I quietly remove 5% to 10% of your crop, let us not pretend this is a minor snack. That is my own little windfall tax - imposed without approval, collected without mercy.

You study me with admirable seriousness. Population cycles. Feeding damage. Habitat preferences. Palm age effects. Undergrowth. Road proximity. Rainfall. You produce papers. I produce losses.

I do not read your journals. I simply live inside your footnotes.



Dinner, Delayed

Humans do not merely dislike rats. They research us first, then prepare dinner.

The cleverest weapons are not traps or teeth but **anticoagulant baits** - wax blocks dressed up like kindness, scented with palm oil and fish meal or prawn dust, placed along our runways with the false generosity of a host who already knows the ending.

The trick is delay. Eat tonight, feel fine tomorrow, suspect nothing. Meanwhile, the poison quietly prevents the blood from clotting. Small internal leaks become larger ones. No immediate pain, no instant lesson, no useful warning to the rest of us. That is why it works.

No drama. Just delayed liquidation. Some compounds, like **bromadiolone**, can turn one night of confidence into a fatal miscalculation. **Warfarin**, the old uncle in the toxic family, prefers repeat business. Either way, the principle is the same: quiet death, poor feedback.

The humans, of course, do not stop at placement. They campaign. Two or three blocks near nests or runways, inspect, top up, record, repeat. Continue until bait acceptance drops below threshold. Very efficient. Very systematic. Very rude.

I eat, I leave, I return to my nest in the canopy or the frond heap. Nothing happens - until later, somewhere away from the bait point, out of sight and out of lesson.

From your side, that is good management. From mine, it is assassination by administration.

Silent Wings, Loud Message

Then come the **barn owls** - **Tyto javanica** - gliding above the estate like a sustainability report that has suddenly grown talons.

Humans love owls because they make pest control sound poetic. Owl boxes among the palms suggest ecology, conscience and cleverness all at once. Auditors approve. Visitors nod. ESG slides practically write themselves.

And yes, owls matter. A settled pair can remove rats steadily and efficiently. No fuel, no batteries, no overtime, no union claims. Just silence, patience and accuracy. For planters, this is biological control at its most elegant.

For rats, it is death with feathers. But even elegance has limits. Owls are complements, not commandments. They help suppress populations; they do not perform miracles. Their success depends on prey density, habitat structure, proper box placement and estate conditions. An owl box installed merely to look impressive is not IPM. It is decorative optimism.

Worse, the owl lives inside a difficult contradiction. Use too much poison and the owl may pay through secondary poisoning. Use poison carelessly, and the predator becomes collateral damage. Use too little control in badly managed fields, and the problem outruns the owl.

Integrated Pest Management, then, is not a hymn. It is a balancing act - part science, part restraint, part field honesty.



Dogs Bark, Rats Adjust

Then, from the ground, come the dogs. Unlike owls, dogs do not arrive with poetry. They arrive panting, noisy and enthusiastic, accompanied by handlers and the unmistakable mood that something visible is about to happen.

In certain blocks, they do make an impression. Rats are flushed, chased and caught. Damage falls. Spirits rise. Reports brighten. There is something undeniably satisfying about seeing control in action.

But let us not mistake drama for permanence. Dogs hunt where they are taken. They hunt when they are deployed. They catch what they can reach. When they leave, and nearby blocks remain untouched, and undergrowth thickens again, we do what rats do best: relocate, recolonise and resume.

Useful? Yes. Final answer? Hardly. Dogs add pressure. They also add noise, disruption and one more variable to a system already crowded with variables.

The Loudest Punctuation Mark

Then comes the gun. Particularly against larger species such as the **swamp giant rat, *Sundamys muelleri***, shooting appears attractive because it is immediate, visible and emotionally satisfying. Something has been done - and loudly too.

But a gunshot is punctuation, not policy. It removes bold individuals. It may quieten a hotspot. It may buy time. But it does not remove food, improve sanitation, change habitat or correct managerial complacency. It startles the estate, not transforms it. We adapt. We move lower, later, quieter. Shooting reshuffles the sentence. It does not rewrite the paragraph.



A Rat's Thank-You Note

If I were a rat in your estate, I would not first thank the owls, the dogs, the gunmen or even the bait chemists. I would thank you.

Thank you for loose fruits left after harvest. Thank you for sanitation rounds postponed because "next week also can". Thank you for messy line-sides, overdue pruning and frond heaps that become nurseries, corridors and hiding places all in one.

Thank you for field discipline diluted by labour shortage, weak supervision or that most dangerous estate disease of all: tolerance.

You call me resilient. I call you generous.

Where sanitation slips, I breed. Where order weakens, I multiply. Where the field becomes permissive, I prosper. That is the awkward truth. The rat's best ally is often not biology, but untidiness.

For all the science of baits, owl boxes, dogs, guns, GIS maps and damage thresholds, none can outwork a sloppy estate forever. A messy block is not merely vulnerable to rats. It is an invitation written in loose fruit.

So when rat numbers rise, do not always look first to the owl box or the bait station.

Sometimes, the real problem is under your boots.

The Real Lesson

This is why the industry is right to push Integrated Pest Management. IPM is not romance with one method. It is not baits versus owls, dogs versus discipline, or gunshots versus fieldcraft. It is about timing, thresholds, balance and judgement.

Monitor first. Act when numbers justify it. Combine sanitation, habitat management, biological control and targeted chemical use with discipline rather than panic. Rotate, review and recalibrate.

Below threshold, good field practice and ecological checks should do much of the work. Above threshold, intervention becomes necessary - but measured, deliberate and reviewed. Dogs and shooting have a place, yes, but they are supplementary and situational, not substitutes for estate order.

Zero rats is fantasy. Low rat pressure is management.

And perhaps that is the deeper lesson. Plantations are living systems, not laboratories. The rat survives not because planters are foolish, but because the field is dynamic, imperfect and full of unintended generosity.

In trying to outsmart the rat, the estate is really being asked a more uncomfortable question: how well do you know your own field?

Good management is not the total absence of rats. It is the presence of vigilance, sanitation, ecological sense and humility.

For in the end, the estate does not reward those who dream of absolute control. It rewards those who notice the loose fruit, respect the threshold, keep the field clean and never mistake neglect for a small matter.

And tonight, while the owl glides, the bait waits, the dogs rest and the reports are filed, I will still be here - listening, adjusting, surviving.

As rats do. But whether I merely survive or truly flourish, dear planter, depends less on my cunning than on your discipline. All the best.

Sustaining Malaysia's Palm Oil: The Strategic Path to Yield Optimisation

Edited by Zahidah Zahidi

Source from: Nur Nadia Kamil, Techno Economics Research Unit, MPOB, at the MPOB Palm Oil Economic Review & Outlook (R&O) Seminar 2026



Malaysia's palm oil sector remains a strategic economic pillar. The industry supports hundreds of thousands of jobs and contributes substantially to export earnings and rural livelihoods.

However, future growth will not come from land expansion. Oil palm is already the most land-efficient oil crop globally. Incremental gains must now be driven by yield optimisation and operational efficiency. In this context, two structural risks stand out: labour constraints and climate variability. Sustaining the current yield recovery depends on how effectively estates manage both.

The Labour-Yield Equation: A Domino Effect

Malaysia's palm oil sector remains a strategic economic pillar. The industry supports hundreds of thousands of jobs and contributes substantially to export earnings and rural livelihoods.

However, future growth will not come from land expansion. Oil palm is already the most land-efficient oil crop globally. Incremental gains must now be driven by yield optimisation and operational efficiency. In this context, two structural risks stand out: labour constraints and climate variability. Sustaining the current yield recovery depends on how effectively estates manage both.

Labour Intensity = Number of Harvesters & Fruit Collectors ÷ Harvested Area			
Low (25%)	Medium-Low (50%)	Medium-High (75%)	High (100%) baseline
0.017 harvesters/ha 1 harvester: 57 ha	0.017 harvesters/ha 1 harvester: 57 ha	0.045 harvesters/ha 1 harvester: 22 ha	0.060 harvesters/h 1 harvester: 17 ha

Low-labour estates produce approximately 3.472 t/ha less FFB compared to high-labour estates. Yield penalties widen progressively as labour availability declines. The mechanics of this loss are a "domino effect." Insufficient labour leads to extended harvesting intervals, pushing cycles beyond the optimal 7–10 days. This delay results in increased rotten and loose fruits, lowered total FFB tonnage, and ultimately reduces the Oil Extraction Rate (OER).

In contrast, maintaining optimal harvesting intervals through adequate manning can boost yields by 5% to 20%.

Climate Variability: A Delayed but Lasting

While labour is a manageable internal variable, the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) represents an external risk that is becoming more frequent and intense. Critically, oil palm yield responds with a lag. Current production reflects weather conditions from **10 to 24 months earlier**. Elevated soil temperatures up to two years ago can depress today's harvest.

Strong El Niño (MEI +2.0)

- FFB yield loss: -2.30 t/ha (7.05% below mean)
- Oil yield loss: -0.38 t/ha (6.09% below mean)

Moderate La Niña (MEI -1.0)

- FFB yield loss: -1.83 t/ha (5.61% below mean)
- Oil yield loss: -0.30 t/ha (4.81% below mean)

The Buffer: Investment as Insurance

Nutrient management plays a measurable buffering role. During strong El Niño episodes, estates with no fertiliser investment recorded cumulative losses of 2.98 t/ha over 24 months. Even minimal fertiliser application significantly mitigated yield decline compared to zero input.

In volatile climate conditions, cutting fertiliser expenditure to manage short-term cash flow may deepen medium-term production losses.

Moving Forward: A Resilient Strategy

To navigate the coming years, Malaysian plantations must adopt a proactive, data-driven stance. Reducing the "harvester-to-hectare" ratio through technology is no longer optional; it is a requirement to mitigate labour volatility. Estate management must treat climate data as a leading indicator for harvest forecasts two years out. Maintaining optimal application even during lean years ensures the palms have the nutrient reserves to withstand environmental stress.

By shifting our focus toward resource optimisation and climate adaptation, Malaysia can ensure its palm oil industry remains not just a legacy of the past, but a resilient leader of the future.



OIL PALM MINISTRIES, ITS AGENCIES AND RELATED ASSOCIATIONS

MALAYSIA



Ministry of Plantation and
Commodities (KPK)
www.kpk.gov.my



Malaysian Palm Oil Board
(MPOB)
www.mpob.org.my



Malaysian Palm Oil
Council (MPOC)
www.mpoc.org.my



Malaysian Sustainable
Palm Oil (MSPO)
www.mspo.org.my



Malaysian Palm Oil Green
Conservation Foundation
(MPOGCF)
www.mpogcf.org



Malaysian Palm Oil
Association (MPOA)
www.mpoa.org.my



Malaysian Estate Owners'
Association (MEOA)
www.meoa.org.my



Sarawak Oil Palm
Plantation Owners
Association (SOPPOA)
www.soppoa.org.my



The East Malaysia Planters'
Association (EMPA)
www.theempa1889.wix-site.com/empa



The Incorporated Society
of Planters (ISP)
isp.org.my



Sarawak Dayak Oil Palm
Planters Association
(DOPPA)
www.doppa.org



National Organisation of
Smallholders
(NASH)
www.pkpkm.org.my



Malaysian Agricultural
Producers Association
(MAPA)
www.mapa.net.my

INDONESIA



Badan Pengelola Dana
Perkebunan Kelapa Sawit
(BPD PKS)
Indonesian Palm Oil Plantation
Fund Management Agency
<https://www.bdpd.or.id/>



Gabungan Pengusaha Kelapa
Sawit Indonesia (GAPKI)
Indonesian Palm Oil
Association
<https://gapki.id/en/>



Indonesian Oil Palm
Research Institute (IOPRI)
Pusat Penelitian Kelapa
Sawit (PPKS)
<https://iopri.co.id/>



Palm Oil Agribusiness
Strategic Policy Institute
(PASPI)
<https://palmoilina.asia/>



Asosiasi Petani Kelapa Sawit
Indonesia (APKASINDO)
Indonesian Palm Oil Farmers
Association
<https://dpp-apkasindo.com/>



Asosiasi Petani Kelapa Sawit
Mandiri (APKSM)
Independent Palm Oil Farmers
Association



Forum Pemuda Sawit
Indonesia (FPSI)
Indonesian Palm Oil Youth
Forum
<https://www.forumpemudasawit.or.id/>



Gabungan Pengusaha
Perkebunan Indonesia (GPPI)
Indonesian Plantation
Entrepreneurs Association
<https://www.gppindonesia.com/>



Indonesian Planter
Society (IPS)
Masyarakat Planter
Indonesia
<https://www.ips-planter.or.id/>



Serikat Petani Kelapa
Sawit (SPKS)
Indonesian Oil Palm
Smallholders Union
<https://spks.or.id/>

EVENT LIST 2026

12 - 13 JAN

Palm Oil Economic Review and Outlook Seminar (R&O) 2026
Berjaya Times Square Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, MY

9 - 11 FEB

37th Palm & Lauric Oils Price Outlook Conference & Exhibition (POC2026)
TBC, Kuala Lumpur, MY

10 - 12 FEB

3rd International Simposium Ganoderma (ISGANO) 2026
Adimulia Hotel Medan, Sumatera Utara, INA

17 - 19 APR

Pakar Pertanian Expo (PPE)
MAEPS Serdang, Selangor, MY

22 - 23 APR

2nd HaiSawit Symposium (HASI) 2026
Hotel Bidakarta Jakarta, INA

23 - 24 APR

International Palm Oil Millers Conference (IPOMC) 2026
Royale Chulan KL, MY

6 - 7 MAY

16th PALMEX Indonesia 2026
Hall A1 & A2, Jakarta International Expo (JIEXPO), Kemayoran, INA

14 - 16 MAY

4th AgTech International Agro Expo
Perda Convention Centre, Penang, MY

25 - 27 JUN

4th AgTech International Agro Expo
Setia City Convention Centre, Selangor, MY

7 - 9 JUL

4th Technology & Talent Palm Oil Mill Indonesia (T-POMI)
Holiday Inn Bandung Pasteur, West Java, INA

13 - 15 JUL

11th International Planters Conference (IPC)
Royale Chulan Kuala Lumpur, MY

28 - 30 JUL

12th Indonesia International Palm Oil Machinery & Processing Technology Exhibition (INAPALM Asia)
Jakarta International Expo (JIEXPO) Kemayoran, INA

6 - 7 AUG

Asia Palm Oil Conference (APOC) 2026 | 15th PALMEX Thailand
CO-OP Exhibition Centre, Suratthani, THA

6 - 8 AUG

4th Sawit Indonesia Expo (SIEXPO) 2026
Pekanbaru Convention & Exhibition, Riau, INA

10 - 12 SEP

9th Malaysia International Agriculture Technology Exhibition (Agri Malaysia)
Malaysia International Trade & Exhibition Centre (MITEC), KL, MY

6 - 8 OCT

16th PALMEX Medan 2026
Santika Premiere Dyandra Hotel & Convention, Medan, INA

13 - 14 OCT

Oils & Fats International Congress 2026 (OFIC 2026)
Kuala Lumpur Convention Center, KL, MY

16 - 17 OCT

3rd Unlocking Revenue & Sustainability: Palm Carbon Emission Reduction | POMA Dinner
Genting Highlands, MY

7 - 8 NOV

4th AgTech International Agro Expo
Sabah International Convention Centre, Sabah, MY

17 - 18 NOV

5th World Palm Conference 2026 | 13th PALMEX Malaysia
Hall 4 & 5, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, MY



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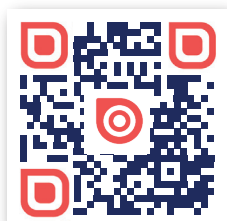
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