



Couch Conservation

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Every one of us can contribute to saving the rainforest every day, whether it's choosing one product over another at the grocery store, donating a few dollars to rehabilitation efforts, sending an email to an irresponsible company, or explaining to a friend why you can't, in fact, pick up a certain brand of cookies. Our actions don't have to be big- even simple actions like filling out a form letter, texting a friend, or crossing something out on your shopping list can make an impact. In this issue, you'll learn how you can be an agent of change and help save the environment- without sitting up.

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RAINFOREST CHALLENGE #5

Maybe you're stuck at home, maybe you have nothing to do, and maybe you feel profoundly unable to make an impact on the environment during these trying times. But your voice does matter, and you should use it.

Over the next week, we challenge you to **do something small**. Make a change to your grocery list, tell a friend about palm oil, or [sign a petition](#) urging a company to become sustainable. Even if you're stuck inside, decisions you make will still have an impact.

ORANGUTAN GANG NEWS

All of the Orangutan Gang's scheduled events have been canceled in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, including our annual appearance at the Davidson Young Scholar Summit. That doesn't mean, however, that you can't make a difference and help save the rainforest during quarantine.

Now that you're shopping online, you're less likely to look at the ingredients for the products you buy, so you may not notice when a product contains palm oil. But since you're also no longer driving to the grocery store, you can try repurposing that time to find sustainable products using websites like [Products Without Palm Oil](#). By making these kinds of decisions, you'll be helping drive sustainability and change despite being stuck at home.

You can find information about possible Orangutan Gang events over on our [Upcoming Events page](#). Thank you for saving the rainforest today!

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Kai S

"My name is Kai, I am 9 years old, and I am passionate about animals and animal conservation. I've always had an interest in animals, especially preserving them and their natural habitats. I first heard about the palm oil crisis through the book *Love the Orangutan* by Stefan Costa. I am familiar with many orangutan conservation efforts, and I discovered Pangaea and the Orangutan Gang through Athena's Advanced Academy. I am willing to do whatever it takes to help the Orangutan Gang, as it has a very important role in teaching, helping and educating about the grim situation of orangutans in Borneo and Sumatra. I encourage everyone to [join the Orangutan Gang](#) as it has a very important role in orangutan conservation efforts.

"When shopping for food, I always check the ingredients for palm oil. I educated myself about which hidden ingredients might contain palm oil, including glyceryl, ethyl palmitate, and palm kernel oil (PKO). I try to avoid buying palm oil, but when I do, I make sure it is Rainforest Alliance or RSPO Certified. I've also created several presentations educating the public regarding the orangutan crisis. I also encourage people to sign petitions to limit or ban unsustainable palm oil use, such as [this petition](#) urging Trader Joe's to use sustainable palm oil."

If you are an Orangutan Gang member looking to be featured in an upcoming Member Spotlight, contact us at orangutangang.org@gmail.com and you could end up in our newsletter!



Kai S, Orangutan Supporter



ACTS OF CHANGE

Now that you're at home, you may be spending more time than usual on the couch. But even though it seems like you can't do much, trapped as you are at home, you can still make an impact and help save the rainforest without sitting up.

For example, you could make a change to your online grocery list to include a more sustainable product rather than its destructive counterpart. Or you could [sign a petition](#) to decrease palm oil's impact. You could text [a link about palm oil](#) to one of your friends, or email a company using a [prewritten form letter](#), urging them to reconsider their palm oil policy. The possibilities are endless. And now that you're at home for longer periods of time, you have the time to devote to simple acts of "couch conservation".

These kinds of acts may not seem like they matter very much, but little choices like this add up and make a difference over time, creating a much larger impact in the long run. An act of couch conservation is an act of change, and one that you can initiate. Take some time today to act.

FEATURED PRODUCT #5

EMPIRESQUID ORGANICS

This issue, we feature EmpireSquid Organics, a skin care company with a commitment to using sustainable ingredients. EmpireSquid offers a range of handcrafted [sunscreens](#) which can help you avoid both sunburns and palm oil. You can find EmpireSquid products online at <https://www.empiresquid.com/>.



MADI VORVA INTERVIEW

Madi Vorva was the co-leader of a successful eight-year campaign to remove palm oil from Girl Scout cookies. Here, Madi is interviewed by Pangaea F, Orangutan Gang founder and director.

PF: How do you currently apply the skills you learned when you started doing conservation work?

MV: My Girl Scout cookie campaign fundamentally influenced the person I grew up to be. I learned so many skills, from negotiation and public speaking to critical thinking, research, and how to scale up a project and grow an audience. My current job at the [Cambridge Conservation Initiative](#) requires me to engage with stakeholders from the conservation, private and academic sectors. I'm able to apply what I learned from my campaign to facilitate conversations with these groups to ensure we're creating diverse and productive partnerships.

PF: How were you able to convince companies to engage and work towards sustainability instead of replying with typical bureaucratic "stock answers"?

MV: It wasn't easy and I received many generic answers dismissing my concern. It took nearly 5 years for the national Girl Scout organization to even agree to sit down and discuss the issue. That was really discouraging, but once the media picked up the story the Girl Scouts felt more compelled to work with us. Eventually, these negotiations led the Girl Scouts to adopt a palm oil policy, the first policy change in the organization's 101-year history driven directly by girls. While this was a step in the right direction, I didn't see it as the final solution. Instead of committing to source deforestation-free palm oil they decided to offset their palm oil use by purchasing GreenPalm certificates, which was really just a greenwashing tactic. Fortunately, Kellogg saw our campaign as an opportunity to become one of the first American businesses to take the lead on responsible palm oil sourcing. They went a step further and adopted a deforestation-free policy for all of their products with palm oil. This bold decision showed palm oil suppliers and traders that both consumers and companies were demanding sustainable palm oil, so it helped incentivize them to change their production practices.

All articles by Pangaea Finn unless otherwise stated

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The Orangutan Gang

www.orangutangang.org

PF: How did you first find out about the palm oil issue?

MV: I first learned about palm oil in 2006. In 7th grade, I was earning my Girl Scout Bronze Award by doing a service project about orangutans, my favorite animal. I discovered that orangutans' rainforest habitat is being cleared for palm oil plantations and that palm oil is an ingredient in 50% of the products in American grocery stores. In some cases, palm oil isn't even listed as an ingredient, but a derivative is in the product. I would go to the grocery store and make lists of everything with palm oil. It shocked me how common palm oil was in foods I was eating daily.

PF: What motivated you to campaign against palm oil in Girl Scout cookies and Kellogg's products?

MV: I had sold Girl Scout Cookies since 1st grade and couldn't believe that palm oil was an ingredient. The Girl Scouts' mission statement includes "to make the world a better place" and to "use resources wisely" but unsustainable palm oil production is at odds with this because it is destroying rainforest and linked to child and slave labor. Girl Scouting had taught me to speak up and lead, so I felt it was my responsibility to bring this issue to the Girl Scout organization. I really took this issue personally, believing that if I didn't do something, who would? At the time, Kellogg's owned Little Brownie Bakers, one of the Girl Scout cookie bakers. To make the largest impact, we pressured Kellogg's, Cargill the palm oil supplier, and Wilmar the palm oil trader to adopt deforestation-free palm oil policies.

PF: What, in your experience, are some of the most effective ways to make a difference through small actions?

MV: Small actions can really add up if you work with others. For example, getting your friends to contact a company calling for them to use deforestation-free palm oil shows there is demand for sustainability. Advocacy activities like letter writing, petitions, social media campaigns, and presentations to your community calling for policy changes can make a meaningful impact because policies are bigger than any individual choice.

PF: How were you able to effectively get the word out about your project?

MV: At the beginning, I focused on getting the word out about palm oil to my middle school. We had palm oil free bake sales, letter writing drives, a petition, and middle school dances to raise money for conservation. Over time, I began contacting different conservation, human rights and climate organizations to see if we could work together to reach a national audience. Together, with groups like the [Rainforest Action Network](#), [Orangutan Outreach](#) and [Climate Advisers](#) we designed social media campaigns and online petitions that over 140,000 people signed. Eventually, the national news learned about our story and it went viral. I was featured in the Wall Street Journal, TIME Magazine, ABC, FOX and CBS News, the New York Times, and NPR. This press coverage helped us inform about 10 million people about the environmental and social consequences of unsustainable palm oil.

PF: What was your most difficult setback and how did you work to overcome it?

MV: My most difficult setback was not being taken seriously because I was brushed off as a naïve young person. I was only 11 when I started my campaign. A lot of people felt that, because I wasn't a scientist or expert, I wasn't qualified to speak up. But because I was a Girl Scout, I felt that my voice should matter to the national Girl Scout organization. I'll never forget when a reporter from The Seattle Times wrote an op-ed saying I should leave this decision up to adults. Yet adults had made the decisions that were causing the problem. It took me 8 years to get the Girl Scouts and Kellogg's to change their practices. In that time, thousands of other Girl Scouts joined my campaign and our voice became too big to ignore. I had a quote from my hero, Dr. Jane Goodall, tacked to my wall that said "If you really want something, and really work hard and take advantage of opportunities and never give up, you will find a way." I guess I was just too stubborn to give up.

PF: What are a couple palm oil free products that you love?

MV: Kit Kats, Lush shampoo and conditioner bars, and Whole Earth peanut butter use deforestation-free sources of palm oil.

Are you an activist who works to help save orangutans and the rainforest? Contact us at orangutangang.org@gmail.com and we could interview you for this newsletter!

To learn more, view merchandise, sign petitions, and take the palm oil free pledge, please visit our website at www.orangutangang.org.