SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE: A CASE STUDY ON THE PALM OIL INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT The palm oil industry has long suffered criticism for destroying forest, wildlife and denying rightful ownership of land. To avert these persisting criticisms, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) was formed by a diverse group of stakeholders in the palm oil industry, to promote sustainable agriculture and address environment impact. Sustainability efforts begin from good environmental, social and agricultural practices: where the oil palm is first planted and grown to it final destination, the plate of a consumer or other products. The palm oil industry is the first to have certified sustainable produce, through the RSPO certification. The sustainability measurements are based on RSPO’s 8 principles, 39 criteria, 126 indicators and guidance. The formation of the RSPO has not been without criticism from various sectors, especially the environmental NGOs. Sustainability in agricultural practices is no more an option, and agriculture need to feed the growing billions in the earth’s population. The ever degrading environment needs protection and restoration. But, we can afford to fail with or without RSPO and other efforts by the industry similar to Malaysian Palm and Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil should be given encouragement and support.

(Key Words: Agriculture, Palm Oil, Sustainable, Small Farmers, Life Cycle)

Abstrak Industri kelapa sawit telah dikritik sejak dahulu kerana menyebabkan perusakan hutan, hidupan liar dan menghalang pemilikan tanah yang sah. Untuk mengatasi masalah-masalah ini, Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) telah diadakan oleh kumpulan yang menunjuk kepentingan ke atas industri kelapa sawit bertujuan mempromosikan pertanian mapan dan menangani kesan-kesan negatif ke atas alam sekitar. Usaha-usaha pertanian mapan bermula dari amalan persekitaran, sosial dan pertanian yang baik; dari masa kelapa sawit mula ditawarkan kepada destinasi terakhir, iaitu pinggan pengguna atau produk lain. Industri kelapa sawit merupakan industri pertama yang memperoleh sertijian hasil yang mapan, melalui sertijian RSPO. Penilaian mapan adalah berdasarkan 8 prinsip RSPO, 39 kriteria, 126 indikator dan petunjuk. Penubuhan RSPO juga telah menerima kritikan dari pelbagai sektor, terutamanya dari kemajuan-pertubuhan alam sekitar bukan kerajaan (NGO). Pertanian mapan bermula lagi merupakan suatu pilihan dan pertanian perlu untuk memenuhi keperluan penduduk bumiputra yang meningkat. Alam sekitar yang semakin dicemari, memerlukan perlindungan dan pemanfaatan. Akan tetapi, kita mampu gagal dengan atau tanpa RSPO dan usaha-usaha lain dari industri yang menyerupai kelapa sawit Malaysia dan Indonesian Sustainable Palm Oil perlu diberi galakan dan sokongan.

(Kata kunci: Pertanian, Kelapa Sawit, Mapan, Petani Kecil, Life Cycle)

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many definitions of sustainable agriculture, organic farming, and ecological farming. Sustainable agriculture is characterised by managing the land as a living system in which the farmer/grower acts to support a dynamic balance among the plants, animals, insects, soil, and water. The essentials are those the land a living system embedded in a broader ecosystem and understanding how to manage all farm practices on the basis of this holistic perception.

The RSPO or the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil has adopted the Brundtland definition and has placed efforts begins from good environmental, social and agricultural practices: where the oil palm is first planted and grown to it final destination, the plate of a consumer or other products.

A balanced society through Prescott-Allen’s model, where social and economic factors are further emphasised through governance, human well-being and resources demands (Prescott-Allen, 2006), draws a wider rim around sustainability measures. A wider rim takes the farmers/growers into regional programs for water management, watershed conservation, rebuilding soil quality, ecosystem restoration, and reforestation. Thereby, all activities including agriculture needs to consider