



## Dr. Oz Responds to GRASP Challenge

Popular television host Dr. Mehmet Oz responded to concerns expressed by the Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP) and others regarding red fruit palm oil today by posting an on-line blog that specifically addresses the threat unsustainable production poses to great apes and their habitat in Africa and Asia.

Writing in “The Oz Blog,” the host of the daily syndicated “The Dr. Oz Show” warned that “permitting the clearing of thousands of acres of rainforests to make room for palm oil farms does endanger the environment along with the orangutans that live there.”

Added Oz: “Careless decisions will lead to the destruction of rainforests, the decimation of wildlife, and the exploitation of indigenous peoples.”

“The Oz Blog” can be found at <http://blog.doctoroz.com/dr-oz-blog/the-environment-and-you-w hy-you-should-make-sustainable-choices>.

GRASP ambassadors Dr. Jane Goodall and Dr. Richard Wrangham had earlier challenged Oz to clarify his endorsement of red fruit palm oil his “most miraculous find for 2013” during a January 3 segment of his program. But Oz failed to warn viewers that the production of palm oil is a major threat to the long-term survival of orangutans in Southeast Asia and other great apes in Africa.

Oz’s enthusiastic support for red palm fruit oil – without mentioning the possible environmental risks or consequences – touched off a buying frenzy and angered many conservation

organizations.

“As is often the case, many viewers took our advice and started purchasing the oil in vast quantities,” Oz wrote. “Despite its multitude of health benefits, red palm oil has the risk of being produced in a way that endangers wildlife in different parts of the world. I hear your concerns, and I am concerned as well.”

GRASP officials worked with Oz’s staff and production company to craft his response.

“GRASP is pleased that Dr. Oz has chosen to share this important information with his considerable audience,” said GRASP coordinator Doug Cress. “He has made it clear that consumers anywhere in the world can dramatically impact the survival of orangutans and other great apes, and need to make informed consumer choices.”

“The Dr. Oz Show” is broadcast in 188 countries, and currently ranks as one of the highest-rated daytime programs in recent history. Oz is also the author of six best-selling health books, and has a regular column in Time magazine and Oprah magazine.

GRASP is a unique alliance comprised of partner nations, research institutions, United Nations agencies, conservation organizations, and private supporters working to protect great apes and their habitat in Africa and Asia. For more information, please visit [www.un-grasp.org](http://www.un-grasp.org)

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### ***(Original Article) GRASP Challenges Dr. Oz***

*21 January 2013 - Great Apes Survival Partnership (GRASP) ambassadors Dr. Jane Goodall and Dr. Richard Wrangham today challenged popular television host Dr. Mehmet Oz to clarify his endorsement of red palm fruit oil so that consumers might appreciate the negative impacts of unsustainable palm oil cultivation on great apes and their habitat.*

*Oz declared red palm fruit oil as his “most miraculous find for 2013” during a January 3 segment of his syndicated program, “The Dr. Oz Show.” But Oz failed to warn viewers that the production of palm oil is a major threat to the long-term survival of orangutans in Southeast Asia and other great apes in Africa.*

*“Dr. Oz is a popular television personality whose words carry great weight,” said Goodall. “Thus his statements regarding red palm fruit oil could have a devastating effect on great apes around the world, particularly orangutans.”*

*In Southeast Asia, more than 80 per cent of the orangutans’ habitat in Borneo and Sumatra has been lost to agricultural conversion in the past 20 years, predominantly for the production of palm oil. The wild orangutan population has plummeted in that time, and the Sumatran orangutan is classified as “critically endangered.”*

*At the current rate of population loss, experts believe orangutans could soon become extinct in the wild.*

*“At a time when many multi-national corporations are turning away from the use of palm oil and seeking sustainable alternatives, Dr. Oz did not reference the environmental crisis at all,” Goodall said.*

*“Consumers need to understand that products that contain palm oil – ranging from chocolate bars to house paint – are often produced at the direct expense of orangutans and their forest homes.”*

*Oz said on the television program that red palm fruit oil can help cure cancer, reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s disease, promote weight loss, and acts like a “stop sign for aging.” He said he believes that red palm fruit oil is a secret that “extends the warranty on nearly every organ in your body.”*

*At no time did Oz refer to orangutans or the fact that Indonesia’s deforestation rate is currently*

*third-fastest in the world. An essay on “The Dr. Oz Show” website by an alternative health expert only briefly mentions the “negative environmental impact” of palm oil and the potential “extinction of orangutans.”*

*Another GRASP ambassador, Dr. Richard Wrangham, said the same palm oil threat is now beginning to impact Africa.*

*“There is no doubt that the international demand for palm oil has devastated much of Southeast Asia's biodiversity, threatening the existence of orangutans in the process,” said Wrangham.*

*“But increasingly, we are seeing the same scenario played out in Africa. A cheap, profitable crop like palm oil is difficult for many to turn down, even if it means wiping out chimpanzee or gorilla habitat in the process. Surely Dr. Oz's audience would like to make informed consumer choices with so much in the balance.”*

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*Notes to Editors*

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*The 2011 UNEP report [The Orangutan and Economics of Forest Conservation in Sumatra](http://www.orangutanreport.un-grasp.org) is available at: [www.orangutanreport.un-grasp.org](http://www.orangutanreport.un-grasp.org)*

*“The Dr. Oz Show” is an American daily talk program co-produced by Harpo Productions and Sony Pictures Television Distribution that features Oz, a cardiothoracic surgeon and teaching professor at Columbia University who became famous for his appearances on “The Oprah Winfrey Show” beginning in 2004. “The Dr. Oz Show,” which is in its fourth season, is broadcast in 188 countries, and currently ranks as one of the highest-rated daytime programs in recent history.*

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