The importance of the smallholder to the palm oil industry has long been recognised. Like in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, about 40% of the land utilised for oil palm in Malaysia is owned and managed by smallholders. The crop is a source of income for about 640,000 farmers and their families. To prosper in the global vegetable oil market in the next 100 years, say the industry’s stewards, land utilised for oil palm in Malaysia is owned and managed by smallholders.

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technologies and best practices. Their smallholders are typically managed using conventional methods, and they are often not aware of better fertiliser or seedlings. Consequently, their plots are lacking the financial means to invest in better practices, increase the quality and quantity made available to the smallholders to meet the challenges faced by smallholders in meeting zero deforestation commitments and looks for sustainable ways to enhance their productivity and incorporate best management practices.

“Farmers have to see the continuing commitment from the changes that they have made. This can only happen when farmers know what to do, how to monitor, and what needs to be done based on the information gathered.”

Over the past seven years, Wild Asia has field tested the idea of obtaining a sustainable palm oil certificate. The benefits of being certified is a concept that is hard to explain to a smallholder who has been doing things his way for decades. How do you explain an intangible concept such as improved market access? Our way of achieving sustainability in oil palm oil industry is by taking a long-term approach at the grassroots level,” says Reza.

The idea is that oil palm smallholders aim for sustainability certifications, the direction must be towards incorporating genuine long-term sustainable practices. Otherwise, the entire industry will continue to be criticised for environmental damage or social abuse.

“Whether or not oil palm smallholders aim for sustainability certifications, the direction must be towards incorporating genuine long-term sustainable practices. Otherwise, the entire industry will continue to be criticised for environmental damage or social abuse,” says Reza.