

Palm oil free, with more saturated fats

2nd Edition

A comparative analysis of the nutritional values appearing on the packaging of 60 products. Does palm oil always mean more saturated fats? Not so.

Published on 10 October 2017

ForFreeChoice

Defending Consumers' Rights To Free Choice

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Abstract

Palm oil has fallen victim to a defamatory campaign for reasons that are obviously commercial. Many food companies have removed it from their products, saying they want to reduce saturated fat content. The absence of palm oil has been clearly highlighted on packaging and in different communication campaigns, linking this directly or indirectly with improved quality and more wholesome products. This second edition of the study “Palm oil free, with more saturated fats”, provides a wider analysis of products present on the market confirming the conclusions contained in the first version. It reveals in fact, that in many cases the absence of palm oil does not correspond to lower levels of saturated fats, compared to similar products that do contain palm oil. In other cases the benefit is barely significant from a nutritional perspective, above all when taking into account the daily diet as a whole¹. Moreover, the use of the “palm oil free” label presents a misleading message, even from an environmental perspective. Palm oil plantations are in fact the most sustainable of all crops. They can be only be replaced by less sustainable crops, with evident harm to the environment. In addition to having a greater yield per hectare, when compared to other vegetable oils, such as rapeseed and soya, palm oil requires less fertilizers, pesticides and energy².

The conclusion, therefore, is that the indiscriminate use of the “palm oil free” claim, that appears on the packaging of food products, risks fooling citizen consumers into making the wrong choices. The analysis by For Free Choice, a citizens’ association that defends freedom of choice and promotes the scientific method, has demonstrated that “palm oil free” product labels are often misleading and that the detractors’ accusations are often unfounded.

The reason for a new edition

This second edition of the study “Palm oil free, with more saturated fats”, contains analyses of more products available on the market and confirms the conclusions contained in the first edition.

We have expanded the range of products analysed, like biscuits and snacks, and added two new categories: ice creams and breaded products. Even in these two market segments, only a few products from which palm oil was removed have recorded an improvement in nutritional values in relation to the amounts of fat. In the majority of these, the total and saturated fat level is equal, if not greater than, that of products that do use palm oil, which in many cases has been replaced with ingredients that are not necessarily better either from a

¹ De Souza et al., *Intake of saturated and trans unsaturated fatty acids and risk of all-cause mortality, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes: systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies*, British Medical Journal, 2015; Sette et al., *CREA Alimenti e Nutrizione*, 2013.

² Data and official sources can be consulted in the Palm Oil section of the For Free Choice website: www.forfreechoice.org/palm-oil/

nutritional or organoleptic perspective, nor, for that matter from the point of view of sustainability. Consumers, therefore, find themselves unknowingly buying a food product that contains the same amount of saturated fats, as well as ingredients that are even less sustainable. In other words, they are tricked by the word “free” because the palm oil is “replaced” with other similar ingredients, but for which the consumer is often unaware of the origins, the nutritional properties and the environmental impact.

It is evident that different companies, even though they resort to the use of health and in some cases environmental slogans, have removed palm oil simply to fall in line with a commercial trend. Worryingly, we have also recorded that many producers of alternative oils and fats have backed smear communication campaigns against palm oil, receiving extensive media coverage, as in the case of butter³.

Being supporters of the experimental method and wanting to test out our theories still further, we have endeavoured to call into question our first work, trying to dismantle its conclusions. We failed. This study, in fact, confirms yet again that the absence of palm oil does not guarantee greater safety or fewer saturated fats in a product, which is the opposite to what many food brands maintain commercially on labelling or in advertising. They have removed palm oil, but they have not always reduced saturated fats, and in only a few cases have they achieved a minimal improvement with a limited impact on the daily consumption of fats. And yet, they deceive consumers, telling them the product is healthier.

Our intention, therefore, is to underline that this research was created to show how consumers are often conditioned to buy products that they believe to be more healthy but aren't. That is because they have been subjected to a succession of advertising

campaigns that demonise palm oil, without, however, providing any scientific facts. Moreover, these campaigns omit to explain that the palm oil has necessarily been replaced by other fats that are not always better, either technically or qualitatively.

Our aim remains that of encouraging companies to use more transparent commercial practices that respect consumers; to use information that helps consumers to develop a greater critical awareness and make free and more knowledgeable choices; to encourage legislators to promote and guarantee that consumers receive correct information, without suffocating the market, but creating conditions that will mean citizens are not misled with incomplete information.

Trade war against palm oil

Between 2015 and 2017 different brands of food products decided not to use palm oil (hereinafter referred to as palm or PO) in the preparation of their products. They did it ostentatiously, making reference to arguments that, in some cases, can be linked to environmental ideologies and health issues in many others, sometimes even to both. Naturally, the reasons underlying these choices are not ideologically based, but evidently linked to business. The abandonment of palm oil in order to pursue a commercial trend can be defined as palmwashing, echoing the more well-known concept of greenwashing. This word is used to describe the marketing and communication strategies put in place by companies, organizations and others, in order to improve their own reputation, in the eyes of the public, with respect to environmental sustainability, with a view to diverting attention from bad practices that are potentially harmful to the environment.

³ Unlike what some farmers' organisations have maintained publicly, the vast majority of companies have not replaced palm oil with butter, primarily for technical reasons, and therefore the recent price increase in the latter cannot be linked to not using the former. What is more, butter contains more saturated fats (just a little) compared to palm oil, and unlike palm oil it also contains cholesterol. Moreover it does not have the characteristics to be considered and advertised as being healthier. This alternative would therefore be useless from a nutritional point of view, but it would also be penalising, on an environmental level, given that livestock herds have a much greater impact compared to oil plant cultivations.

The same principle has been replicated with palm oil as it has with many other ingredients and substances that many companies in the food and packaging industry have decided to abandon in order to respond to media pressure in the wake of aggressive campaigns, of doubtful scientific veracity. These campaigns have been put forward by a variety of different associations, non-governmental organizations, and more generally veritable activists who repeatedly attack and threaten market operators. For all of these campaigns, including the one constructed against PO, the arguments don't stand up to the facts and above all they are a far removed from any scientific evidence and do not follow any experimental method. In the case of palm oil, for example, there are no scientific studies that prove it is carcinogenic to human health⁴. Neither Italian, European or world authorities have limited its use as a precaution, as has been done on other occasions (like, for example, with GMOs). Even the theme of deforestation, which is undoubtedly a topic of discussion, is tackled in an ideological way, with arguments that do not seek to take on and resolve the issue, but tend simply to superficially generalise the problem.

Palmwashing

Many of Italy's small and large food companies have purposely taken the view that palm oil is

harmful to health, and that the plantations from which this oil is extracted are the major cause of deforestation. Science and the facts show the opposite to be true. Palm oil is, in fact, not harmful to health if consumed as part of a balanced diet and in moderation⁵. This should be case for all fats, including vegetable oils. Oil palm plantations are some of the most sustainable. In short, what would happen if all the palm plantations were to be eliminated? The inhabitants of the producing regions would replace them, quite rightly, with other plantations that would be potentially less sustainable than the oil palm.

The ambiguity of the claims

The palmwashing, promoted by these companies, threatens to mislead citizen consumers by means of the nutritional information and advertising claims added to the packaging, displayed in retail outlets of communicated for advertising purposes. This study intends to investigate the correctness towards citizens of information, advertising (claims) and labelling. Nutritional labels and the information tables will be highlighted, in particular with regard to saturated fats, the type of oils and fats used and the claims made on the packaging of the different brands being examined.

Critics of this ingredient often contest the fact it is present in many products predominantly aimed at

⁴ E. Fattore, R. Fanelli, Palm oil and palmitic acid: a review on cardiovascular effects and carcinogenicity, International Journal of Food Science and Nutrition, 2013.

⁵ There are a number of studies supporting this theory, one of which was published by the Department of Public and Veterinary Health and Food Safety of the Italian National Institute of Health in 2016. This document is available for consultation at the following link: http://campagneliberali.org/oliodipalma/files/2016/09/C_17_pubblicazioni_2481_allegato.pdf (Italian)

To view other accredited scientific studies on the topic, visit the following section on the For Free Choice website: <http://www.forfreechoice.org/category/palm-oil/palmoil-research/>

younger people, like, for example snacks, packaged breakfast and break-time products, increasing the fat content, in particular saturated, in the recipes⁶. The aim of this research, therefore, is to understand whether, for specific categories of products, the presence or otherwise of palm oil is actually instrumental at the level of total and saturated fats. Put simply, the question that has been posed is: does the presence of palm oil mean more fats, above all saturated, when compared to products where it has been eliminated?

Different companies, startled by the fuss created in the media and politically, preferred to remove palm oil with a palmwashing operation, and replace it with other fats and vegetable oils. But what has it been replaced with?

This study will not analyse the chemical aspects of the ingredients contained in the products and it is based on a simple, but efficacious comparison between labels and nutritional fact tables. The products examined were chosen on the basis of the type of food selected and their widespread consumption among the younger age ranges of the population. There is no statistical purpose in analyzing consumption by frequency and type or the interchangeability for consumers. Neither is this research a medical study intended to highlight

the effect on the health of individuals of the ingredients being considered. A large part of the campaign against this ingredient has, in recent years, played on this axiom, namely, palm oil = high levels of saturated fat. Different companies, startled by the fuss created in the media and politically, preferred to remove palm oil with a palmwashing operation, and replace it with other fats and vegetable oils. But what has it been replaced with? In the main by coconut oil, sunflower oil, corn oil, but also butter, cocoa butter and shea butter⁷.

Based on the declarations and claims by the brands that have replaced palm oil in the ingredients, the nutritional profile with the new formulations and the new ingredients ought to demonstrate the clear superiority of alternative fats over palm oil. However, all it took was a comparison of some nutrition facts tables and a check of the ingredients of a number of products divided according to type, to understand the fallacy of the axiom stated above. The advertising and media messages that are made to appear as though they are the absolute truth, clearly fall apart in the face of factual evidence.

Palm oil free or more saturated fats

The following tables, drawn up by For Free Choice, contain the information that appears on the packaging of certain products, broken down into types, and they are useful for clarifying the

⁶ The guidelines published and distributed by the WHO, in its Fact Sheet no. 394 in September 2015, contain advice not to exceed the 10% threshold of daily caloric need arising from the consumption of saturated fats. Generally, as reported by the Ministry of Health and by INRAN (Italian Institute for Food and Nutrition Research - now known as CRA [Council for research in farming and the analysis of the agricultural economy] - NUT [Centre for Food and Nutrition Research]): “The quantity of fats that ensure good health vary from individual to individual, depending on gender, age and lifestyle. An indicative quantity for adults is that which supplies between 20% to 25% of a diet’s overall calories (for sedentary individuals) and up to a maximum of 35% (for those undertaking intense physical activity)”. These scientific indications confirm how it is conceptually erroneous to view a fat-free diet as being systematically better or more healthy compared to a balanced diet where fats do not exceed 10% of the daily caloric intake.

⁷ We would like to point out that the first three oils are less sustainable than palm oil, when one takes into account production per hectare. The oil palm is the most productive oil plant in the world. One hectare of land can produce around 4 tonnes of palm oil, 0.8 tonnes of rapeseed, 0.6 tonnes of sunflower and 0.4 tonnes of soya. Thanks to the higher yield, palm oil contributes to more than 30% of the total agricultural output of vegetable oils, occupying only 6% of the total areas intended for the agricultural production of vegetable oils in the world.

concepts described to this point. The products were chosen on the basis of what was available on the main shelves of major retail outlets. The choice does not have a representative value, nor does it have any commercial purpose, but it merely intends to demonstrate with some examples how the substitution of palm oil has led to little improvement and in fact probably even none, in many products targeting, in the main, adolescents.

What emerges from the following tables, is that the “palm oil free” claim and the consequent replacement with different vegetable oils, in those products examined by this study, does not necessarily correspond with an improved nutritional profile, from the point of view of saturated fats, when compared to brands that do use palm oil in their ingredients.

Table 1 - Comparative analysis of the nutritional profile and claims in the packaged “cornetti” (Italian croissants) and snacks (different brands).

Brand	Product/Type	% Fats in 100g	Of which saturated fats	Claim: “Palm Oil Free”	Ingredients
Barilla	Nastrine/Braided puff-pastry snack	28	15	Yes	cocoa butter, sunflower oil, coconut oil, safflower oil, butter
Colussi/Misura	Classic cornetto	25	8.1	Yes	sunflower oil, shea butter
Barilla	Chocolate filled croissant	23.5	12.5	Yes	sunflower seed oil, coconut oil, safflower oil
Bauli	Classic cornetto	22.5	11.5	No	palm oil, sunflower oil
Bauli	Amor di sfoglia/Braided puff-pastry snack	22.25	11.5	No	palm oil, sunflower oil
Bauli	Chocolate filled croissant	20	10.2	No	palm oil, sunflower oil
Motta	Classic cornetto	13	6.1	No	palm oil, sunflower oil
Motta	Chocolate filled croissant	13	6.1	No	palm oil, sunflower oil

Source: elaboration by For Free Choice on the basis of the packaging found on the market or on company official websites.

The comparison of packaged croissants, already provides clear results: the products (Barilla and Colussi/Misura) that advertise the absence of palm oil on their packaging, have a higher saturated fat content compared to similar products (branded Motta and Bauli) that do use palm oil. Barilla's chocolate-filled croissant contains 23.5 g of fats per 100 g of product, of which 12.5 g are saturated, using a mix of sunflower, coconut and safflower oil. Motta's chocolate-filled croissant, that uses palm oil instead, has only 13 g of fats per 100 g of product, of which only 6 g are saturated. Colussi/Misura “palm oil free”, even if it looks better than Barilla where it says saturated fats, still has a fat

content, considering both total and saturated fats, that is higher than Motta's “with palm oil”: 25 g total and 8.1 g saturated.

Similar conditions appear on “palm oil free” braided puff-pastry snack products placed on the market by the company Barilla, such as their Nastrine, when compared to others “with palm oil” products, such as Bauli's Amor di Sfoglia. According to the nutrition facts table, the first product shows a saturated fats content that is far higher if compared to the second: the Nastrine have almost 30% more saturated fats (15/100g vs. 11.5/100 g).

Table 2 - Comparative analysis of the nutritional profile and claims in shortbread biscuits (different brands)

Brand	Product/Type	% Fats in 100g	Of which saturated fats	Claim: "Palm Oil Free"	Ingredients
Barilla	Abbracci/Chocolate and cream shortbread biscuits	23.5	10.5	Yes	butter, sunflower oil
Balocco	Girandole/Chocolate and cream shortbread biscuits	22	9.2	Yes	sunflower oil, cocoa butter, butter
Simply	Chocolate and cream shortbread biscuits	21.7	10.7	No	palm oil, butter
Bauli	Farfallegre/Chocolate chip and milk shortbread biscuits	18.7	10.2	No	palm oil, coconut oil
Barilla	Batticuori/Chocolate shortbread biscuits	18.5	6	Yes	sunflower oil, butter
Colussi	Re di Cuori/Chocolate chip shortbread biscuits	19.4	5.4	Yes	corn oil, butter
Galbusera	Buoni Così/Shortbread biscuits with no added sugar	17.5	5.8	Yes	corn oil, butter
Galbusera	Buoni Così/Shortbread biscuits with milk	11.6	7.8	Yes	milk, butter
Saiwa	Crusca d'Oro/Dry biscuits with wholemeal flour	19.5	5.7	No	palm oil, rapeseed oil
Saiwa	Oro Saiwa Gocce Gustose/Chocolate shortbread biscuits	15	7.5	No	palm oil, chocolate

Similar cases have also been highlighted in the biscuit segment. The "chocolate and cream shortbread biscuits" category was examined. The products were: Barilla's Abbracci, Simply's Cream and Chocolate Shortbreads, Balocco's Girandole and Bauli's Farfallegre. The Simply and Bauli

biscuits contain palm oil, and yet they appear to be the best when it comes to total fat content (21.7 g and 18.7 g, respectively). Moreover, when it comes to saturated fats, they have a profile that is on average in line with the benchmark selected for this comparison.

BOX 1 – Comparative claims

The citizen/consumer should pay particular attention to the so-called comparative claims. That is to say all those "messages", often found on packaging of food products, aimed at advertising improved nutritional values as a result of new formulations of different ingredients. Regulation (EC) No. 1924/2006 on nutrition and health claims allows companies to make comparisons on nutritional values only in relation to the average of the reference benchmark, and not to the same product's previous formulations. Any claim that contains wording such as "contains 30% less saturated fats compared to the previous formula" for example, is illegal, and therefore punishable. Some large companies have made use of such improper information and this has already been pointed out by many.

It should also be mentioned that, if the comparison were to be made in relation to the current market average, the percentage margins for improvement would be extremely lower and often not even highlightable, according to the provisions of law.

Table 3 - Comparative analysis of the nutritional profile and claims in the healthy lines of shortbread biscuits (different brands)

Brand	Product/Type	% Fats in 100g	Of which saturated fats	Claim: "Palm Oil Free"	Ingredients
Barilla	Mulino Verde/ Honey shortbread biscuits	15.6	5.8	Yes	Sunflower oil, eggs
Galbusera	Zero Grano / Honey shortbread biscuits	18	6.3	Yes	sunflower oil, butter
Vitsnella	Rice flour and red fruits shortbread biscuits	13	3.4	No	palm oil, rapeseed oil
Galbusera	Zero Grano / Wholemeal shortbread biscuits	18	4.9	Yes	sunflower oil
Vitasnella	Wholemeal cereal shortbread biscuits	13	3.4	No	palm oil, rapeseed oil
Vitasnella	Rice and yoghurt shortbread biscuits	16	3.1	No	palm oil, rapeseed oil

In this new edition the "Shortbread Biscuit" segment has been integrated with the "healthy" baked products. Analysing the nutritional values from Barilla's Mulino Verde line and Galbusera's Zero Grano line, both palm oil free and comparing them with another well-known brand of light products: Vitasnella. In this case too, as can be seen from the numbers shown in the table, the absence of palm oil does not result in lower saturated fat levels: Galbusera's wholemeal shortbread biscuits with sunflower oil contain, in 100 g of product, 18 g of fats of which 4.9 are saturated, as opposed Vitasnella's wholemeal shortbread biscuits, with palm oil, that contain 3.7 g of saturated fats out of a total of 13 g.

Despite resorting to the "palm oil free" claim, and the recent launch of a press and TV communication campaign, entitled "Percorso Salute" (The Healthy Route), Galbusera's baked products do not provide particularly low percentage of saturated fat contents. If this is the case for the Zero Grano healthy line, it is equally so for the Buoni Così line. Galbusera's shortbread biscuits with no added sugar, and the milk shortbread biscuits respectively contain 5.8 g and 7.8 g of saturated fats, which is well above the market average (4.5 of saturated fats).

Table 4 - Comparative analysis of the nutritional profile and claims in wafers (different brands)

Brand	Product/Type	% Fats in 100g	Of which saturated fats	Claim: "Palm Oil Free"	Ingredients
Mondeléz	Milka/Chocolate wafer	28	18	No	palm oil
Galbusera*	Buonicosì/Wafers with cocoa cream (single portion)	28	16.5	No	palm oil, corn oil
Galbusera*	Buonicosì/Wafers with cocoa cream	27.3	21.3	Yes	coconut oil, corn oil
Loacker	Napolitaner/Wafers with cocoa cream	27	22	No	palm oil
Nestlé	KitKat/Chocolate wafer	26	18	No	palm oil, cocoa butter
Balocco	Napolitaner/Wafers with cocoa cream	25	22	Yes	coconut oil
Coop	Wafers with cocoa cream	24.8	21.6	Yes	coconut oil
Ferrero	B-Ready/Wafers	24.1	8.4	No	palm oil

*Products marketed with and without palm oil.

Table 5 - Comparative analysis of the nutritional profile and claims in snacks with chocolate wafers (different brands)

Brand	Product/Type	% Fats in 100g	Of which saturated fats	Claim: "Palm Oil Free"	Ingredients
Ringo	Goal/Biscuit and chocolate snack	25	13.7	Yes	sunflower oil, butter
Saiwa**	Oro Ciok/Dark chocolate-based biscuit snack	23	12	No	palm oil, cocoa butter
Coop	Chocolate-based biscuit snack	21.3	12.9	Yes	cocoa butter, cocoa paste
Ferrero	Kinder Cards/Chocolate-based biscuit snack	26.7	12	No	palm oil, milk

**Oro Ciok snacks are available in three varieties: Ciok Latte (milk), Ciok Fondente (dark chocolate), Ciok Nocciola (hazelnut). The table is examining the Oro Ciok variety with dark chocolate

Table 6 - Comparative analysis of the nutritional profile and claims in Crostatine - Tartlets (different brands)

Brand	Product/Type	% Fats in 100g	Of which saturated fats	Claim: "Palm Oil Free"	Ingredients
Barilla	Crostatine all'albicocca - Apricot tartlets	14	5.5	Yes	butter, sunflower oil
Coop	Crostatine all'albicocca - Apricot tartlets	13	3.4	Yes	sunflower oil, cocoa butter, safflower oil
Germinal*	Crostatine (single portion)	10	4.2	No	palm oil

When it comes to the categories including wafers, snacks with wafer and chocolate and tartlets, all products consumed above all by children and the younger ages ranges and therefore to be protected, the results are equally significant. The products containing palm oil do not have worse nutritional profiles compared to those that publicize they don't contain any. The tables show that they have similar values: Oro Cioks with palm oil have 12 g of saturated fats in 100 g of product, the same value as Ferrero's Kinder Cards, whilst the palm oil free Ringos contain 13.7 g. Ferrero's B-Ready wafer, with palm oil, only has 8.4 g of saturated fats, so that together with Milka and KitKat chocolate coated wafers - where we find palm oil among the ingredients - are better, from a lipid profile, than similar palm oil free products .

The comparison between the fruit tartlets leads us in the same direction: Germinal's product containing palm oil, with 4.2 g of saturated fats in 100 g is placed midway between Barilla's tartlets (5.5 g) and the Coop's (3.4 g). Finally, there is the particular case of Galbusera and the wafers of the Buonicosì line in which it is possible to see the difference between the nutrition facts table prior to the replacement of palm oil, where the saturated fats are 16.5 g in 100 g, whilst in the new "palm free" version, they reach 21.3 g in 100 g.

Table 7 - Comparative analysis of the nutritional profile and claims in breaded products (different brands)

Brand	Product/Type	% Fats in 100g	Of which saturated fats	Claim: "Palm Oil Free"	Ingredients
Rovagnati	Momenti/Dry cured ham morsels	17	7	yes	sunflower oil, cooked ham
Fileni	Magic Zoo/ Chicken morsels	8.3	2.6	yes	chicken, peanut oil
Amadori	Breaded/Cordon Bleu	11	2.2	yes	turkey, chicken, rapeseed oil
Findus	Cordon bleu	13.5	2.9	no	chicken breast, rapeseed oil
Sadia	Cordon bleu	13	3.7	yes	chicken, turkey, sunflower oil
Coop	Cordon bleu	13.7	3.4	no	chicken, turkey, peanut oil
AIA	Breaded/Chicken cutlet	13	4.7	no	chicken, sunflower oil
Findus	Cod fillet in batter	17	1.3	no	cod, rapeseed oil, palm fat
Findus	I Gratinati / Cod with potatoes and rosemary	6	1.2	no	cod, coconut oil, palm oil
Frosta	Breaded plaice fillets	9.1	1.2	no	Plaice, sunflower oil

The analysis of the breaded fish and meat-based preparations (Table 7) demonstrates that the presence of saturated fats does not depend on the type of oil used in the breading but on the product itself (type of meat, red, white, poultry etc.). The only companies to have advertised the absence of palm oil are Amadori and Fileni, whose breadings are prepared with sunflower, rapeseed and peanut oils. Amadori's palm oil free Cordon Bleu, for example, contains 2.2 g of saturated fats in 100 g of product, whereas the Findus gratinated cod, that contains palm has 1.2 g.

Amadori's Cordon Bleu is marketed by leveraging the "palm oil free" claim, whereas other products, such as Cordon Bleu from Findus (2.9 g of saturated fats) do not boast about the absence of palm oil. This choice to highlight the absence of palm oil in Amadori's Cordon Bleu, on the back of the pretentious axiom that "palm oil free" means "healthier", could penalise those products that do not resort to the claim, even though they have the same characteristics, such as the Findus product.

Table 8 - Comparative analysis of the nutritional profile and claims in ice creams (different brands)

Brand	Product/Type	% Fats in 100g	Of which saturated fats	Claim "Palm Oil Free"	Ingredients
Algida	Cremino/Stick	23	16	no	coconut oil, cream, chocolate
Nestlé	Mottarello/Stick	20	17	No	coconut oil, sunflower oil
Sammontana	Cinque Stelle/Biscuit	17	12	No	coconut oil, butter
Nestlé	Maxi Bon/Biscuit	14	10	No	palm oil, coconut oil, sunflower oil
Coop	Ice Cream Biscuit	8.7	7.1	Yes	coconut oil, butter
Mars	Ice Cream Bar	7.5	5	No	coconut oil, palm fat, chocolate
Coop	Ice Cream Bar	19.3	14.7	Yes	coconut oil, palm oil, chocolate

The last category analysed is that of packaged ice creams. The use of palm oil in ice creams on the market is limited predominantly to wafers and biscuits, for which it is difficult to produce a significant analysis. In any case, what stands out is the comparison of Coop's ice cream bar with wafer, containing coconut and sunflower oil (14.7 g of saturated fats) with the Mars ice cream, with palm oil, 5 g of saturated fats, which confirms that palm oil does not always mean a higher level of total and saturated fats. Even Nestlé's Maxi Bon, with palm oil, appears to have two grams less of saturated fats, compared to Sammontana's Cinque Stelle that, nevertheless, correctly does not promote the product with the claim. Other palm oil free products show lower saturated fat levels. However, there is no evidence to support that this is linked to the absence of palm oil, but rather to the ingredients used as a whole.

Conclusions

Apart from other variables, such as production technologies and the quality of the raw materials, that are nevertheless very significant and influential in the creation of the final product, the results of our analysis, even following the updating and broadening of the empirical base, appear to confirm that the replacement of palm oil does not necessarily determine an improvement in the

nutritional profile of food products, with reference to total and saturated fats.

On the contrary, it demonstrates that different products containing palm oil contain fewer fats, both total and saturated, compared to the corresponding "palm oil free" and with alternative oils and fats (sunflower, coconut, corn, shea and safflower oils or animal fats such as butter and cream).

Consequently, it is possible to say that there is a serious risk that consumers will be confused and deceived by claims and messages that promote palm oil free foods as systematically better from a nutritional point of view. It is therefore important to cast a critical eye over information and advertising, in particular when it targets children and the under 18s. Abusing the "palm oil free" slogan actually conceals two crucial aspects that, for reasons obviously associated with marketing, are not always known to consumers. Firstly, palm oil plantations are more sustainable than any other cultivation. Palm oil plants have an average yield of 3.62 tonnes per hectare: 5 times greater than rapeseed (0.79 tonnes/hectare) and even 9 times more than soya (0.37 tonnes/hectare). Globally, palm oil plantations require 17 million hectares of land, that is to say 6% of all farmed lands, to provide 35% of the world need for vegetable oil. Soya actually requires 111 million hectares just to provide 27% of global requirement. Moreover, compared to other vegetable oils, palm oil requires

less fertilizers, pesticides and energy, when compared with soya and rapeseed oils.

Secondly, palm oil is the only vegetable oil obtained through pressing, thus preserving the important nutrient properties such as vitamins and sterols, that are fundamental for human diet. All other vegetable oils like, for example, the great replacement for palm oil, i.e. sunflower oil, are sent for refining only after they have been immersed in a solvent bath.

The message that palm oil is harmful to health is often driven by certain political groupings (see different parliamentary documents, proposed laws and acts of the public administration) and further amplified by the media. Emblematic cases, in this regard, have involved educational institutions like the Istituto Tecnico Commerciale (Technical Commercial Institute) “Bonelli” in Cuneo⁸ that has chosen to exclude certain packaged products containing palm oil from tenders related to

automatic distribution. In its three-year plan for the Right to Study, the Regional Council of the Marche, approved an amendment that invites university refectories not to use palm oil and, instead, replace it with other ingredients.

Accepting a false message in such a radical way, because it is not supported with any scientific evidence, not only harms consumers, but also the entire economic segment. Denigrating and discriminating against palm oil, on the basis of health and fats, contrasts with an analysis of the facts and the scientific method according to which, in order for a theorem to be assumed to be true, it must be supported by evidence and empirical proof. The equation, according to which palm oil contains more saturated fats, as proven by the facts, confirms its unreliability and inconsistency.

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Please quote this study with the following formula:

For Free Choice (2017), “Palm oil free, but more saturated fats. A comparative research on nutritional profile indicated on the packaging of 60 food products. 2nd Edition.”

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This publication can be downloaded at no cost at www.forfreechoice.org/palm-oil/

⁸ With regard to this issue, For Free Choice has highlighted this clear violation of the freedom of choice of students/consumers in a letter to councillors of the Region of Piedmont. The letter can be read here (Italian): <http://www.campagneliberali.org/olio-di-palma/caro-assessore-la-nostra-lettera-allassessore-alla-sanita-della-regione-piemonte/>