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into the scheme have to look to parallel markets. The main demand for sustainable palm oil comes from Europe and the USA. China and South East Asia continue to buy conventional palm oil for the most part.” Nevertheless, the WWF believes that integrating sustainability criteria into the agreement is a step in the right direction.

Rapeseed and sunflower oil are no substitute

You cannot simply substitute Swiss-made oils for palm oil, as Uniterre are suggesting, says Oettli. On a per-hectare basis, oil palms produce much more oil: around three tonnes. Soybean, rapeseed and sunflower all manage less than one tonne. Oil palms also require fewer pesticides compared to other crops, the WWF has reported. Furthermore, the oil palm is a perennial – unlike soybean, rapeseed and sunflower.

What is curious about the whole debate is that palm oil is at the heart of the politics surrounding the trade agreement with Indonesia, but it accounts for a minuscule share of the volume of trade with Indonesia. Switzerland imports about 26,500 tonnes of palm oil per year, but the biggest proportion of this comes from Malaysia (22 per cent). Indonesia supplied just 35 tonnes last year. Exports that can be sold duty-free to Indonesia are of much greater economic relevance to Switzerland, benefiting the mechanical engineering and pharmaceutical sectors in particular.

It is this streamlining of market access that Jan Atteslander of *economiesuisse* believes is the agreement’s

biggest plus. “According to the World Bank, Indonesia is likely to become one of the world’s biggest economies over the next few years, so a trade agreement allows us to steal a march on other countries,” he says. Above all, the sustainability requirements for palm oil send an important message, albeit less of an economic one. “EFTA is pioneering in this respect and can inspire other countries to devote more attention to palm oil sustainability as well.” However, it is a pity that these requirements only apply to palm oil, says Oettli of WWF Switzerland: “Unfortunately, the environmental provisos attached to the free trade agreement are of no relevance to things like wood, prawns and other commodities,” he says.

Referendum committee website:
nein-zum-freihandel.ch

economiesuisse position paper
(available in French and German):
ogy.de/palmoil

EVA HIRSCHI IS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST BASED
IN LAUSANNE

Switzerland in figures

Good, not so good

75

Encouraging non-COVID-related statistics – yes, they do exist. Take the share of electricity obtained from renewable sources, for example. In 2019, 75 per cent of the power consumed in Switzerland was sustainable. In particular, solar, wind, biomass and hydroelectric power sources are becoming increasingly important.

369

Bottles, cans, newspapers, batteries, organic waste – the Swiss love recycling these and many other materials. Per capita, 369 kilograms of waste are properly recycled every year in Switzerland. We can either applaud this or we can ponder how on earth we manage to produce so much rubbish in the first place.

41

Switzerland has myriad regional newspapers. Turn the pages and we realise how similar a lot of the news looks nowadays: same content, same analysis, same layout. The loss of media diversity is most evident in coverage of domestic politics, where 41 per cent of all newspaper articles now appear in several, if not many, publications simultaneously. Our media landscape is anything but varied.

58.6

Happier news from Switzerland’s universities, where the proportion of female students is increasing. For example, 58.6 per cent of people who study at the University of Zurich are women. This figure is set to rise. Marie Heim-Vögtlin, who in 1874 became the first female student to graduate from Zurich, would certainly have been pleased. She was in a minority of one back then.

160

The number of new cars sold in Switzerland is currently down year-on-year. Electric cars are the only vehicles bucking this trend: sales were 160 per cent up in August 2020 alone. One only hopes that all these “eco-friendly” cars actually use electricity from renewable sources.

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