

Response to Concerns About Palm Oil in Girl Scout Cookies

The recent [Associated Press piece](#) about palm oil is one of those stories that's so big and far reaching that I've had to let it sink in. The more I've sat with it, the more it's become clear to me that one thing is missing from the ongoing discussion about it: congratulating the Girl Scout who started us down this path.

Back in 2017 from her home in Tennessee, Olivia Chaffin used her voice to speak up about the use of palm oil in Girl Scout Cookies. She did it again in 2020, and now in 2021 her voice has made its way around the world. Other people, powerful people, are hearing her.

Here in western Washington, we heard her and along with her concerns about deforestation, the story brought to light so many other issues connected to the palm oil chain. Issues that many of us, myself included, didn't know were linked to palm oil production. As Girl Scouts of Western Washington's CEO, it's important for me to say that we condemn any form of child abuse, child labor or human trafficking. This view is shared by our parent organization, Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). The Girl Scouts organization exists to build girls' courage, confidence, and character to help them on their journey to successful lives, on their terms – both in our own community and across the globe.

In raising the problem of palm oil in Girl Scout Cookies, Olivia is doing exactly what she learned to do in Girl Scouts: use her voice to call attention to something she cares about deeply. In this instance, she's raising a very needed alarm about a horrific tragedy that should be of universal concern. Her skill in doing this comes at least in part from the Cookie Program itself, where the skills she's learning—decision-making, business ethics, working with people, goal setting, and how to



handle rejection—translate to an advocacy campaign. The leadership skills she’s gained are also on excellent display!

The Girl Scout Cookie Program isn’t just a key part of our brand. It’s critically integral to the journey that girls like Olivia take, resulting in outcomes like Girl Scouts being more likely than non-Girl Scouts to seek challenges and learn from setbacks, 62% to 42%. And Girl Scouts being more likely than non-Girl Scouts to take an active role in decision-making, 80% to 51%. Whether a Girl Scout is trying to get through middle school, or launch a global advocacy campaign, those sorts of attributes are keys for success.

Thanks to Olivia’s skills, this complex issue is being discussed on both a national and global level. It’s being discussed at GSUSA and by our bakeries, and it’s being discussed by our Girl Scouts and their families. Both bakeries have made clear their efforts to only use palm oil certified as ethically produced.

We understand the complexity of protecting this supply chain, and that there’s not a viable alternative to palm oil yet, which necessitates its continued use as an ingredient in Girl Scout Cookies. We also know that Little Brownie Baker already works to adhere to the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil’s (RSPO) segregated sustainable palm oil model. However, we cannot look away from the horror being inflicted on girls and women as part of palm oil production.

Girl Scouts of Western Washington is calling out the absolute imperative that only ethically sourced palm oil be used in Girl Scout Cookies. Our council is standing with the girls and women who work in the palm fields, adding our voice to theirs and joining GSUSA in calling on the bakeries and the RSPO to take immediate action if standards are being violated.

And we’re calling on our western Washington community to understand and support the power of the Girl Scout Cookie to help our young people become leaders like Olivia. As she said in the last line of the AP story, “I’m not just some



little girl who can't do anything about this. Children can make change in the world. And we're going to."

We'll be right there behind you, Olivia, cheering you on. And standing with you to be a part of the change we need to see in the world.

For GSUSA's full statement on palm oil, please [click here](#).

With great respect,

Megan Ferland, CEO
Girl Scouts of Western Washington