Palm Oil

EUDR mapping for palm oil — v1.1

Palm Oil EUDR Overview — Colombia

EUDR Context

Field	Value
eudr_commodity	palm
country_focus	Colombia
deforestation_risk	medium
last_updated	2026-05-26

Overview

Oil palm is one of Colombia's most significant agricultural commodities under the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). Colombia ranks as the fourth largest palm oil producer globally and the leading producer in the Western Hemisphere, with approximately 596,000 hectares under cultivation distributed across 161 municipalities in 21 of 32 departments. In Q1 2026, Colombia produced 560,000 metric tons of palm oil, representing a 3% gain over the same period in 2025. Fedepalma projects total annual production could reach 2.5 million metric tons by 2028 if sustainable aviation fuel markets develop.

The EUDR classifies palm oil as one of seven regulated commodities (Article 1), requiring all operators placing palm oil or derived products on EU markets to demonstrate that production did not contribute to deforestation after December 31, 2020. For Colombian exporters, this creates both compliance challenges and competitive advantages given the country's relatively strong sustainability track record compared to Southeast Asian producers.

More than 6,000 oil palm growers operate across Colombia's four production zones (North, East, Central, and South-West), with 85% classified as small-scale producers cultivating fewer than 50 hectares each. The sector generates over 177,000 jobs and has been a critical engine of rural development, though concerns about land concentration and displacement in conflict-affected regions persist.

Colombian Context

Colombia's palm oil sector is concentrated in the Llanos Orientales (Meta, Casanare), the Caribbean coast (Cesar, Magdalena), and the Pacific lowlands around Tumaco (Nariño). The Tumaco corridor is the most sensitive from a deforestation standpoint, as expansion has historically occurred at the forest frontier and in areas affected by armed conflict and forced displacement. In the eastern plains, palm plantations have largely replaced degraded pastureland rather than primary forest, presenting a lower deforestation risk profile.

Fedepalma, the national federation of oil palm growers, coordinates sustainability efforts through 68 production centers (núcleos palmeros) and actively promotes RSPO certification. Over 20% of Colombian palm oil production is RSPO-certified, and the sector claims that 99% of certified crops are verified deforestation-free. Colombia's 44-million-hectare agricultural frontier—of which only 15% is currently cultivated—positions the country as one of eight nations capable of expanding agricultural output without additional deforestation, though this potential requires rigorous land-use planning.

EUDR Compliance Requirements

Operators exporting palm oil to the EU must comply with the following under the EUDR:

- **Geolocation mapping**: Provide polygon coordinates for all plantations supplying the export chain, traceable to individual plots.
- **Deforestation-free verification**: Demonstrate via satellite imagery or equivalent monitoring that no deforestation occurred on the sourced land after December 31, 2020.
- **Legality proof**: Confirm production complied with Colombian national law, including environmental permits, land titles, and labor regulations.
- **Due diligence system**: Maintain a documented due diligence process covering risk assessment, risk mitigation, and annual reporting.
- **Traceability to mill**: Map supply chains from plantation through extraction mills to export, ensuring no mixing with non-compliant sources.

Fedepalma has been working with supply chain members since 2018 to build traceability infrastructure. The main compliance challenges for Colombia are managing the large number of smallholder suppliers (who may lack formal land titles) and ensuring transparency across the estimated 68 mill catchment areas. High-oleic hybrid varieties, which now cover 110,000+ hectares (18.5% of planted area), represent an emerging premium segment where EUDR compliance can command price premiums in European markets.

Palm Oil Traceability & Certification

EUDR Context

Field	Value
eudr_commodity	palm
country_focus	Colombia
deforestation_risk	medium
last_updated	2026-05-26

Overview

Traceability and certification are the operational backbone of EUDR compliance for Colombia's palm oil sector. The supply chain runs from approximately 6,000 growers through 68 extraction mill clusters (núcleos palmeros) to refineries, exporters, and ultimately EU importers. Each link in this chain must be mapped and documented to satisfy the regulation's due diligence requirements. Colombia's relatively consolidated mill infrastructure—compared to the highly fragmented structures in West Africa—provides a structural advantage for building traceable supply chains.

The Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) is the dominant voluntary certification scheme operating in Colombia. Over 20% of national production is RSPO-certified, and the standard's chain-of-custody models (Identity Preserved, Segregated, Mass Balance) provide a foundation that can be adapted for EUDR compliance. However, RSPO certification alone does not satisfy the EUDR, which requires plot-level geolocation data and a December 2020 deforestation cutoff date that may differ from RSPO's audit timelines.

Fedepalma's "Uniendo Eslabones" (Joining Links) strategy, operational since 2018, has invested in digital traceability platforms connecting smallholder producers to mills and international buyers. This three-year initiative developed classification and traceability protocols for raw materials from plantation to finished product, creating data infrastructure that aligns well with EUDR requirements.

Colombian Context

Colombia's palm oil supply chain has four distinct stages that must be traced: plantation (finca), extraction mill (planta extractora), refinery/processing, and export. Approximately 85% of producers are smallholders cultivating fewer than 50 hectares, which creates a significant data collection challenge. Many smallholders lack formal land titles (particularly in conflict-affected zones like Tumaco), complicating the legality proof required under EUDR Article 3.

Solidaridad and Satelligence have partnered with Colombian supply chain actors to deploy satellite-based deforestation monitoring at the mill catchment level. This technology enables mills to verify that their sourcing areas remain deforestation-free, providing the evidence base needed for EUDR due diligence statements. The Daabon Group, one of Colombia's leading organic palm oil producers, has pioneered full traceability from plantation to export for its EU-bound products.

RSPO-certified operations in Colombia have demonstrated that achieving traceability is feasible: 99% of certified hectares are verified deforestation-free. The challenge lies in extending this model to the remaining 80% of production that is not yet RSPO-certified, particularly in the Pacific coast zone where informal land tenure and conflict dynamics complicate data collection.

EUDR Compliance Requirements

For traceability and certification to satisfy the EUDR, Colombian palm oil operators must:

- **Plot-level registration**: Register every supplying plantation with GPS polygon coordinates (not just centroid points), linked to a unique identifier in the operator's due diligence system.
- **Chain-of-custody documentation**: Maintain records showing the flow of fresh fruit bunches (FFB) from registered plantations to specific extraction mills, with batch-level segregation or at minimum mass-balance tracking.
- **Satellite monitoring integration**: Use remote sensing data (Sentinel-2, Planet, or equivalent) to verify no forest loss on registered plots after the December 31, 2020 cutoff.
- **Legality verification**: Document that each plantation holds valid environmental permits (licencias ambientales), complies with Colombian forest reserve restrictions, and meets labor law requirements.
- **Periodic review**: Update risk assessments annually and respond to new deforestation alerts within the sourcing base.

Existing RSPO certification provides a strong starting point but requires supplementation: operators must add geolocation data at the precision level required by EUDR implementing acts, apply the 2020 cutoff date consistently, and include Colombian legal compliance documentation that goes beyond RSPO's scope. The high-oleic hybrid segment (110,000+ ha) is particularly well-positioned for premium EUDR-compliant channels given its newer plantings and better documentation.

Palm Oil & Deforestation in Colombia

EUDR Context

Field	Value
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country_focus	Colombia
deforestation_risk	medium
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Overview

The relationship between palm oil expansion and deforestation in Colombia is complex and regionally differentiated. Unlike Southeast Asian palm oil—where expansion into tropical peatland forests has been the primary driver of biodiversity loss—Colombian palm oil has followed diverse trajectories depending on the production zone. Research from the University of Wisconsin's GLUE program found that the majority of Colombian palm expansion between 2002 and 2018 occurred on previously cleared land (pasture, degraded areas), with direct forest conversion accounting for a smaller share of new plantings. However, this national average masks significant regional variation.

The EUDR's deforestation-free requirement (Article 3) applies a December 31, 2020 cutoff date, meaning that any palm oil linked to land that was forested before that date and subsequently cleared is non-compliant regardless of local legality. For Colombian producers, this creates a clear incentive to document the pre-2020 land use status of all supplying plantations—a task that is straightforward for established operations in the eastern plains but challenging in recently expanded areas near the Pacific coast.

An IUCN Netherlands assessment of Colombian palm oil supply chain risks identified Tumaco and the Pacific zone as the highest-risk areas for EU importers, followed by parts of Cesar and Santander where expansion borders cloud forest transitions. The eastern plains (Meta, Casanare) were rated as lower risk given the predominant conversion pathway from degraded grassland rather than standing forest.

Colombian Context

Three regional deforestation dynamics characterize Colombia's palm oil sector:

- **Pacific Coast / Tumaco (High Risk)**: Oil palm expansion in Nariño's Pacific lowlands has been linked to conflict-driven displacement, where communities were forced off land that was subsequently

converted to plantations. A Mongabay investigation documented supply chain connections between deforestation-linked palm in this region and European buyers. The area's high rainfall forests and biodiversity (Chocó bioregion) make any forest conversion particularly damaging ecologically.
- **Llanos Orientales / Eastern Plains (Low-Medium Risk)**: The vast savannas of Meta and Casanare represent the largest palm production zone. Most expansion has occurred on existing cattle pasture or degraded grassland, presenting a favorable deforestation risk profile. However, gallery forests (bosques de galería) along rivers and streams within the savanna landscape require protection.
- **Caribbean / Magdalena Medio (Medium Risk)**: Palm operations in Cesar, southern Bolívar, and Santander have historically been associated with paramilitary-era land concentration. While recent expansion has been more formalized, legacy issues around land tenure and secondary forest regrowth create compliance complexity.

Colombia's national deforestation monitoring system (SMByC), operated by IDEAM, provides annual deforestation data at the municipal level. This system, combined with near-real-time alerts from Global Forest Watch and national early warning bulletins, gives operators access to the monitoring infrastructure needed for EUDR risk assessment. Colombia's overall deforestation rate has been declining since 2023, with the government's Comprehensive Deforestation Containment Plan contributing to reduced forest loss in key departments.

EUDR Compliance Requirements

Operators managing deforestation risk in Colombian palm oil supply chains must:

- **Baseline land-use mapping**: Establish the forest/non-forest status of all sourcing plots as of December 31, 2020, using satellite imagery archives (Landsat, Sentinel-2) at sufficient resolution to detect small-scale clearing.
- **Ongoing monitoring**: Implement continuous or periodic satellite monitoring of the sourcing base to detect any post-2020 forest loss, with protocols for excluding non-compliant supply if deforestation is detected.
- **Regional risk differentiation**: Apply heightened due diligence to sourcing from the Pacific coast and Caribbean zones, where deforestation risk is higher, while documenting the lower risk profile of eastern plains operations.
- **Conflict-sensitive sourcing**: In areas affected by Colombia's armed conflict, verify that land acquisition was not linked to forced displacement or illegal appropriation, as required by both the EUDR's legality clause and Colombian transitional justice frameworks (JEP).
- **Smallholder inclusion**: Develop support mechanisms for the 85% of producers who are smallholders to obtain documentation (land titles, environmental permits, geolocation data) needed for compliance, preventing their exclusion from EU-bound supply chains.