Rainforest Action Network defends Indonesia's people, forests, orangutans, against General Mills, 2010

19 January
2010
to: September
2010

Country: United States
Location City/State/Province: Minneapolis

Goals:
To convince General Mills to discontinue their contract with Cargill and cease their use of palm oil sourced from recent deforestation sites in the Malaysian and Indonesian rain forests.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 015. Group lobbying
- 016. Picketing

Methods in 4th segment:

- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 026. Paint as protest

Methods in 5th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals
Methods in 6th segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 162. Sit-in

Notes on Methods:
Unique approach to displayed communications by involving schoolchildren in their creation.

Classifications

Classification: Defense
Cluster: Environment
Group characterization:

- Activists
- School children and Girl Scouts

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders: Rainforest Action Network
Partners: New York Action Network
External allies: Not known
Involvement of social elites: Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment: 
Groups in 2nd Segment: 
Groups in 3rd Segment: 
Groups in 4th Segment: 
Groups in 5th Segment: 
Groups in 6th Segment: 
Additional notes on joining/exiting order: 
Joining order not known

Segment Length: 6 weeks
Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
General Mills
Nonviolent responses of opponent:
None known
Campaigner violence:
None known
Repressive Violence:
None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
6 points out of 6 points
Survival:
1 point out of 1 points
Growth:
2 points out of 3 points
Notes on outcomes:
General Mills issued a statement announcing their plan to eliminate use of controversial palm oil by 2015, but their progress towards this goal is unclear.

Indonesia's people, orangutans, and rainforest are threatened by the widespread planting of trees that produce palm oil for making processed food by giant corporations such as General Foods.

From 19 January to 30 September 2010, Rainforest Action Network (RAN) campaigned against General Mills sourcing and use of palm oil. General Mills used palm oil as an ingredient in much of their food. Their supplier, Cargill, sourced their palm oil from a company based in Indonesia called Sinar Mas. Sinar Mas was responsible for the deforestation of huge tracts of rainforest in Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea. These deforested tracts were then planted for the production of palm oil. While General Mills’ consumption of unsustainable palm oil made up only about one tenth of a percent of the international market, its corporate eminence made it a valuable target for RAN’s campaign.

On 19 January 2010, RAN launched their first major move against General Mills at the company’s headquarters in Minneapolis. Forty-two RAN members spread a 70x30-foot banner reading “Warning! General Mills Destroys Rainforests”. The campaigners sent a helicopter to take aerial photos, which were published on their website along with several articles. Once they accomplished the photo-shoot, the campaigners peacefully left. The photos were distributed to the press, leading to extensive media coverage.

Updates on RAN’s website continued over the next months, but General Mills was not responsive. In April, General Mills released their annual Corporate Social Responsibility Report, which did not emphasize the Palm Oil issue—it appeared only briefly on page 97 of 102.

Meanwhile, RAN prepared for Earth Day. Every year, the organization ran a competition in which elementary school students made posters and slogans promoting sustainability. The theme for 2010’s competition was the use of unsustainable palm oil in popular children’s breakfast cereals, like Cheerios and Lucky Charms, which are distributed by General Mills. On 28 April, RAN arranged for some of the children who created the posters to deliver four hundred of them by hand to General Mills.
headquarters in Minneapolis. Tom Forsythe, the company’s vice president of communications, met and shook hands with many of the children. Again, professional photography and press coverage ensued.

The next day, 29 April, another group joined in the pursuit of General Mills. New York Action Network sent campaigners to the Edison Awards, which General Mills representatives were attending in honor of a nomination. The campaigners brought a banner that read “General Mills, Stop Delaying, Protect Rainforests”. Rainforest Action Network ran an article on their website congratulating the New York campaigners and publicizing their own action as well.

On 1 May, 150 people organized an event in which professional artists displayed their work on sustainability in a gallery. An example of the kind of work shown is a painting of the famous General Mills Pillsbury Dough Boy walking through a burning rainforest. After the event, the RAN website ran an article. The next day, RAN sent campaigners to the Minneapolis May Day parade with symbolic objects including a fake orangutan, chain saws and dead palm oil trees to raise awareness of the issue and intensify pressure on General Mills.

After the parade, RAN campaigners focused their attention on Cargill, the company from which General Mills bought its controversial palm oil. In December 2009, Greenpeace accused them of unjust environmental practices. In May 2010, several campaigners from RAN locked themselves to a staircase in the Cargill headquarters. In July, Cargill made an attempt to save their image by partnering with the World Wildlife Fund for species preservation. In August, Cargill eventually succumbed to public scrutiny by conducting an investigation of Sinar Mas’ practices in Southeast Asia. On 23 September, the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil, which included Cargill as a member, condemned Sinar Mas’ practices, claiming that they violated the industry’s sustainability code.

That same day, RAN sent five young activists from all over the country to stage a protest in Minneapolis outside City Hall. Four dangled from a skyway and another offered support from above. All five were arrested for trespassing. Press coverage ensued and heightened the pressure on General Mills. On 30 September, at the company’s annual shareholders meeting, General Mills’ CEO Ken Powell finally committed to taking action against unsustainable palm oil sourcing. Tom Forsythe, the VP of communications, invited high-ranking RAN members including Ashley Schaeffer into the meeting to present on the palm oil issue. Following the RAN statements, the shareholders drafted a statement that announced General Mills’ intention to use 100% sustainable Palm Oil by 2015. Outside, the meeting, 40 RAN campaigners held up a banner reading, “General Mills Joins Race to Protect Rainforests” and calling on Cargill to “catch up”.

Research Notes

Influences:
RAN pushed other companies to withdraw from controversial sourcing of Palm Oil following the success of the General Mills Campaign (2)

Sources:
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"Poster Delivery to General Mills". Flickr. 29 April 2010.
http://www.flickr.com/photos/rainforestactionnetwork/sets/72157623832930187/


"Palm Oil Key Focus at General Mills Shareholder Meeting". Rainforest Action Network, Understory. 30 September 2010. http://understory.ran.org/2010/09/30/palm-oil-key-focus-at-general-mills-shareholder-meeting/


"General Mills Takes Bold Steps Away from Palm Oil Controversy"


Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:
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