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Oil Palm Plantings at High Altitudes

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Lack of suitable land for expansion of oil palm plantings has resulted in some plantings at high altitudes. Currently most of the oil palm are planted at altitudes of less than 300 m (1 000 feet). Planting at high altitudes (>300 m) results in a number of problems. Thus areas in Sumatera (Indonesia), Cameron Highlands and the Usun Apau Highlands in Sarawak and Kundasang in Sabah, all have a number of problems resulting in low yields. A few high altitude areas in Africa have also been planted.

This paper highlights some of the problems of oil palm planted at high altitudes. A lot of the data presented in this paper has been drawn from Darlan et al. (2013).

*At high altitudes, low temperatures affect the palms metabolism and inflorescences. Low temperatures often result in longer immature periods and low yields. These low temperatures, high humidity and high rainfall also affect the activity and population of the weevil (*Elaeidobius kamerunicus*). Darlan et al. (2013) suggest that other insects such as the Thrips *hawaiiensis* may be more active. Hand pollination is also advantageous. In addition, palm selection can also help improve yields together with some modified agricultural practices such as adjustment of plant density (± 110 palm/ha); pruning and number of fronds on the tree (40-45 leaves for >8-year-old palms and 48-52 leaves for <8-year-old palms. Palms with slower height increments will also be beneficial. In Uganda, yields of 17-20 tonnes per hectare have been reported.*

Keywords: Oil palm planting, high altitudes, pollination, yields, cultural practices.