

Reversing deforestation and biodiversity loss: Can synthetic palm oil help protect the world's tropical forests?

The world's cheapest and most widely used vegetable oil, palm oil production is a [primary driver](#) of deforestation and biodiversity loss in the tropics. These and other problems with the palm oil industry, such as exploitative labor practices, have for years driven interest in more sustainable options. But good alternatives have proven difficult to come by.

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Last year, a startup called [C16 Biosciences](#) opened a gleaming new lab in Manhattan to develop a microbial palm oil alternative, backed by \$20 million from Bill Gates' climate solutions investment fund [Breakthrough Energy Ventures](#).

A California-based startup called [Kiverdi](#) is also working to manufacture yeast oil using carbon captured from the atmosphere, and a [team](#) of bioengineers at the University of Bath is at work scaling up its own strain of oily yeast.

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Jeffrey Linger, a bioengineer at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, commented that development of such microbial oil alternatives is worth pursuing, though he thinks these companies have a difficult path ahead to develop workable strains that can be manufactured at large scale and that can use cellulosic feedstocks. "There are so many knobs you can turn, so I don't want to say it's impossible," he said. "I also don't want to say it's easy."

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here.**](#)