

Forest Cover

a **Global Forest Coalition** newsletter on international forest policy



The big four drivers of deforestation: beef, soy, wood and palm oil

In this issue:



What is being sacrificed for
your premium piece of steak?



Less meat, more forest:
Brighter Green's work in China



Burning trees while saving forests?
The mythology of bioenergy



Palm oil and land grabbing
in Cameroon

About Global Forest Coalition: The Global Forest Coalition (GFC) is an international coalition of 92 NGOs and Indigenous Peoples' Organisations from 61 countries defending social justice and the rights of forest peoples in forest policies. GFC organises joint advocacy campaigns on the need to respect the rights, role and needs of Indigenous Peoples, women and local communities in forest conservation and the need to address the underlying causes of forest loss. Its staff and collaborators work from, amongst others, Paraguay, the Netherlands, Colombia, Thailand and the UK.

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Editorial: Driving deforestation

By Ashlesha Khadse, Global Forest Coalition, India

Trade, international and national, in just four key commodities—beef, soy, wood, and palm oil—is the main cause of deforestation in the world. Increasing demand for these forest-destroying commodities is leading to huge swathes of forest being replaced by vast monoculture plantations and pasture, especially in the global South.

Beef is the **worst deforesting culprit**, and South America, home to the world's most precious tropical forests, is a region dramatically impacted by demand for livestock products. For example, it was found that between 1990 and 2005 clearing forests to make way for pasture was responsible for 71% of deforestation in seven Latin American countries. [1] Palm oil is second only to beef in its climate impacts and is leading to serious deforestation in Southeast Asia—300 football fields of forest are lost in Indonesia for palm oil every hour! [2]

In fact, these impacts are experienced everywhere, including in Europe and North America. This 55th edition of Forest Cover brings us stories from across the world where forests and communities face the impacts of the production and trade in these commodities. It also showcases peoples' campaigns as people across the globe struggle to stop these drivers of forest loss.

Biofuelwatch is at the forefront of campaigns to challenge the use of wood for fuel on an industrial scale. Rachel Smolker's article reveals the way in which forests in the southeast of the USA are being felled to create wood pellets for export to Europe for supposedly 'sustainable' biofuels, exposing not only the scale of this destructive trade, but the way in which it is actively contributing to deforestation and climate change.

The Center for Environment's (CED) article speaks about the tangible impacts of palm oil production upon communities and countries. It shows us how transnational corporations have been grabbing massive tracts of land to produce palm oil in Cameroon. Gross human rights violations, and environmental destruction lie behind palm oil. Despite this, the interest in palm oil as a source of 'sustainable' energy is on the rise. In fact, the highly polluting aviation industry is also looking to shift to



USDA/Flickr



Oliver Munnion/GFC



Mathias Rittgerott/CIC



Mathias Rittgerott/CIC

palm oil based biofuels as described in Almuth Ernsting's article. The International Civil Aviation Organization, ICAO, (a specialised UN organisation that regulates the airlines industry), has been pushing for the use of biofuels as a 'renewable' source of fuels, a completely erroneous idea.



Kristina Bäck shows us how these problems are not unique to the Global South by bringing us a story from Sweden. The Swedish Forest Agency has been granting controversial permissions to log old growth virgin forests like the Ore Forest Landscape. Sweden has been trying to phase out fossil fuels, replacing them with what it considers to be renewable energy including wood-based biomass sourced from old growth forests both from within its own boundaries and by importing wood pellets. [3,4] Many of these forestry companies like the state owned Sveaskog described in the article are certified by agencies like the Forest Stewardship Council, showing us just how little and

misleading such certifications can be. Zdeněk Poštulka also shows us how trade in biomass for bioenergy within the EU is devastating Czech Republic's wetlands, farms and forests.

The production of meat and dairy is another major driver of forest loss, as highlighted in earlier issues of Forest Cover. [5] But there are stories of hope too. Wanqing Zhou takes us to China to talk about her organisation Brighter Green's ground-breaking work on meat consumption in China, exploring the links with increasing deforestation from meat production in Latin America.

Finally, Mary Louse Malig puts a compelling spotlight on global

trade negotiations and trade agreements as drivers of this forest loss. The EU-Mercosur negotiations that Malig describes are a key arena for Mercosur countries to increase their beef exports to the EU, potentially at the expense of Latin American forests. The negotiations, if finalised, will benefit agribusiness and lead to the further expansion of beef and feedstock production, especially soy for animal feed, to the detriment of forests and the women and men who depend on forests for their daily livelihoods.

[1] De Sy *et al* (2015). Land use and related carbon losses following deforestation in South America, <http://www.cifor.org/library/5892/landuse-patterns-and-related-carbon-lossesfollowing-deforestation-in-south-america/>

[2] <https://deforestationandpalmoil.weebly.com/uploads/1/8/8/5/18854416/wwf.pdf>

[3] http://www.fern.org/sites/fern.org/files/Biomass%20imports%20to%20the%20EU%20final_0.pdf

[4] <http://bio-fuel-watch.blogspot.in/2011/02/controversial-logging-exposes-swedens.html>

[5] <http://globalforestcoalition.org/resources/forest-cover-issues/forest-cover-49-meat-driver-deforestation/>

Burning trees while saving forests? The mythology of bioenergy

By Rachel Smolker, Biofuelwatch, USA and GFC Board member



Agriculture, livestock production and logging remain leading drivers of deforestation. But so-called 'modern' commercial and industrial-scale bioenergy is becoming increasingly prominent. Though rarely recognised, currently more than half of the energy classed as 'renewable' in the EU [1], and only slightly less in the US, consists of bioenergy—biofuels for transportation and burning wood/trees for electricity. Renewable energy promotional materials tend to feature images of solar panels and wind turbines, avoiding the rather less attractive reality of smokestacks, industrial corn and soya farms, and palm oil plantations.

Awareness of the problems with large-scale bioenergy has grown, along with a massive body of scientific literature detailing *ad infinitum* that because of the large land footprint required and the length of time which forests need to grow, large scale bioenergy (in pretty much any form), results in more, rather than less, climate-damaging emissions, while also destroying biodiversity, displacing

food production, and undermining human rights.

Biofuelwatch first turned its attention to wood bioenergy when it became clear to us that burning wood for electricity was likely to take off dramatically. It is technologically straightforward (unlike, for example, cellulosic liquid biofuels) and can enable coal plants and other pre-existing power

plant infrastructure to remain viable, so it is favoured by the fossil fuel industry.

Furthermore, wood bioenergy can provide 'baseload' power (24/7, year round), thus putting off the need to invest in the electricity storage and interconnectors which are needed to make 100% 'no-burn' renewables viable. In addition, public sentiment towards burning wood as renewable energy has been favourable. It is viewed by the public and even environmentalists as 'natural'. Many environmental organisations initially promoted biomass enthusiastically, even those that later shifted their position on ethanol as competition with food production was recognised. With mandated targets and subsidies in place, it seemed clear that wood biomass would be the 'low hanging fruit' for renewables and would rapidly expand on a large scale. And it has.



The real face of renewable energy? Biomass is increasingly burned in coal-fired power stations. [nican45/Flickr](#)

Accounting trickery perpetuates the claim that wood bioenergy is 'carbon neutral' (because trees that are burned *might* eventually regrow), allowing energy producers to claim to be reducing emissions. As a result they also receive generous subsidies for burning wood, on the same footing as—and therefore competing with—wind, solar and geothermal (non-combustion) renewables.

According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), wood pellet production has skyrocketed, from 6-7 million tonnes in 2006, to 26 million tonnes in 2015, increasing on average 14% year on year, and it is anticipated to continue to grow exponentially. [2] The bulk of international pellet trade occurs within European countries and between the US and EU, with companies such as DRAX, Oersted (formerly DONG), E.On and RWE purchasing massive quantities of pellets, primarily from the southeastern USA. An estimated 35 pellet plants are now operating or proposed across the southern USA, each with a voracious non-stop appetite for wood. [3]

While the biomass industry continues to claim they use only 'waste and residue', it is clear as day that this is not the case—the wood yards of these facilities are stacked with whole trees, including anything that is considered 'low grade' that cannot be sold as timber.

An exposé of wood sourcing practices for the pellet manufacturer, Enviva, the largest producer in the US, revealed they were in fact harvesting whole trees from rare remaining pockets of



Enviva's Ahoskie wood pellet plant. **Dogwood Alliance**



Wetland hardwood forest destruction for wood pellets, southern USA. **Dogwood Alliance**

bottomland hardwood forests. [4] According to the Southern Environmental Law Center, over 168,000 acres of wetland forest were at high risk from just this one facility. [5] Enviva ships much of the pellets they produce to the DRAX coal plant in UK, which has been converted to burn 50% wood pellets. In 2016, DRAX burned 6.6 million tonnes of pellets, [6] made from 13.2 million tonnes of wood (since two tonnes of wood are harvested for every tonne of pellets manufactured).

DRAX wood consumption is 1.6 times the UK's total annual wood production! [7] Yet all of the trees that are cut down, pelletised and shipped across the ocean to burn, provide a mere 0.74% of the UK's total energy demand. [8] Per unit of energy generated CO₂ emissions from burning wood are higher even than for burning coal. [9] Add to that emissions from shipping the pellets across the ocean, emissions from harvesting operations, transportation, drying, and pelletising, soil carbon losses from logging, and the foregone carbon sequestration associated with

Whole trees are turned into pellets for export to Europe. Dogwood Alliance



Trucks transport hardwood trees to the pellet plants. Dogwood Alliance



cutting the trees down, and any proclaimed climate benefit becomes mighty hard to discern. As a reward for this absurdity, the UK government grants DRAX an astonishing €1.5m in subsidies every single day. [10]

When most people hear this for the first time, they are shocked and appalled. “You mean we are cutting down forests, turning them into pellets, shipping them across the ocean to burn in a coal plant, calling it renewable energy and paying subsidies for this as a supposed climate solution?” people

ask in amazement. It makes no sense, even to a child.

Many organisations have taken on the issue of the US/EU wood bioenergy debacle (including Dogwood Alliance, NRDC, Partnership for Policy Integrity, Fern and BirdLife International among others). However, despite these campaigns, politicians and policy meetings and even lobby campaigns seem endlessly mired in debates over carbon impacts and sustainability standards. We toil over preparation of report after report detailing the fallacy of

burning trees for electricity. Over 800 scientists have written to Members of the European Parliament expressing their concern, stating: **“Even if forests are allowed to regrow, using wood deliberately harvested for burning will increase carbon in the atmosphere and warming for decades to centuries—as many studies have shown—even when wood replaces coal, oil or natural gas.”** [11]

It seems so nonsensical, and yet the policies supporting wood bioenergy (and bioenergy in general) remain, on the whole unchanged.

What will the future hold? As more and more nations get serious about addressing climate change, there is a risk that bioenergy may become increasingly entrenched as a ‘solution’. New bioenergy-related developments and commitments loom on the horizon. Asian markets for wood pellets have been expanding, with growing demand especially from Japan and South Korea. China has set targets to replace a large portion of coal with wood pellets.

Indicative of this broad trend, a joint **“Biofuture Platform”** initiative was launched by 19 nations at the November 2017 meeting of the UNFCCC in Bonn. Its stated objective is: **“to increase the use of low carbon sources (i.e. sustainable bio-mass) as the feedstock for the production of energy, chemicals and materials. In the not-so-distant past, the world relied almost entirely on renewable resources, including biomass, for food, energy, and shelter. We ask you to envision a**

future where this is once again true – many modern needs including plastics, materials of construction, clothing and more importantly energy, can be met by biomass. It has been estimated that, by 2050, half of [the] world's chemicals and materials could be produced from renewable resources.” [12]

Of course, much of the world *still* relies entirely on biomass for food, energy and shelter. But the communities that still depend on ‘traditional’ biomass are amongst the world’s lowest users of energy. If wealthy nations attempt to substitute biomass as a source for their massive energy and material demands, at current levels of fossil-fuelled consumption, their demands will inevitably end in competition with both food production and traditional uses—including by peasant farmers and Indigenous Peoples.

Even at current levels, it is clear that bioenergy is a driver of forest destruction. But, if the many diverse plans to expand its use come to pass, including plans for aviation biofuels and a vast ‘bioeconomy’, we may find ourselves denuding much of the planet in a misguided rush to ‘save it’.

As the bioenergy enthusiasts eyeball the planetary landscape to assess ‘global biomass potential’, there is simultaneously growing recognition of the important role that forests could play in staving off the worst impacts of global warming. There is much discussion about the potential for restoration and reestablishment of forests as an ‘easily available’ tool for sequestering carbon, while also providing many other benefits.

But how can we possibly reconcile massive demand for wood and bioenergy crops, with protection

FAO, for example. This is in spite of many years of civil society pressure demanding a clear distinction. But confounding the two provides a convenient loophole for the forestry industry. If the definition of ‘forest’ includes an industrial tree plantation destined to be harvested for pulp or bioenergy, then the plantation owner can claim to be growing a ‘forest’ while also claiming to provide renewable energy. One way to have one’s cake and eat it too.

In the USA, confusion, deceptive terminology and profound

Monoculture tree plantations shouldn't be classed as forests. **Carbon Violence**



ignorance about forest ecology are the tools of the trade for forest and biomass industries eager to unravel forest protections. For example, the Trump administration recently introduced a “Resilient Forests Act”. Behind the nice sounding

and restoration of forests? This is the conundrum that policymakers face—the proverbial problem of ‘how to have your cake and eat it too’. This discord seems to be a major wellspring of head-spinning confusion and manipulative rhetoric about forests in the context of climate change.

First of all, and very fundamentally, there still remains the ongoing deception inherent in the failure to formally distinguish between forests and tree plantations, by

name, the purpose of the bill is to open up public lands to logging on a massive scale, while also curtailing requirements for environmental assessments and largely eliminating any public participation in decision-making.

The timber and biomass industries also have a long-standing public relations campaign based on the claim that it is necessary to ‘manage’ (that is, log) forests to prevent wildfires that threaten people’s lives and property. Their

argument rests on the myth that if forests are not logged, they will accumulate too much biomass, and thus provide more fuel resulting in more severe fires. In fact, just the opposite is the case, as both common sense and science have shown. For example, a 2016 study demonstrated that the less a forest has been managed (logged), the less severe the fires. [13] This makes sense to most people who have spent time in old growth and logged over forests. Logging disrupts the canopy, allowing more sunlight to penetrate, drying things out, and supporting the proliferation of flammable undergrowth. Further, it is well established that protecting lives and property is best achieved by clearing trees in direct close proximity to homes, not miles away.

In 2017, when catastrophic wildfires swept through communities in California, republican leaders in the US Congress capitalised on the mood to promote their agenda, essentially arguing that forests should be cut down to prevent them from burning. [14] The biomass industry hopes for

subsidies for ‘thinning’, based on fear of fire as a way to acquire cheap feedstock for their projects.

Why has the industry been so successful in perpetuating these myths? In the US, and perhaps elsewhere in the Global North, the answer may lie with an apathetic public that suffers from a profound lack of understanding about forests. Urbanisation, and the failure of our education system, have resulted in a large portion of the population never having stepped foot in a real forest. If they have been into the woods at all, chances are it was actually or had once been a tree plantation. Remaining patches of old growth forest, or even diverse and healthy secondary growth, are rare.

Following the industrial revolution and the ‘timber boom’ that ensued in the early 1900s it is estimated that more than two thirds of American forests have been heavily cut or leveled at least once. The giants that were cut – massive towering pines, huge, abundant and productive American chestnuts (a major staple food source for wildlife and people alike), great towering firs, hemlocks, cedars, oak

and hickory have gone, some at least 200-400 years old when they were felled.

Regrowth, where it can occur, is a long, slow process, and most of us will never see a genuine old growth forest (though many second growth forests are now again spectacularly diverse and awe inspiring). We do not know what we are missing. Our sense of ‘forest’ lacks historical grounding and our knowledge of how forests work—to support life on earth—is woefully lacking. Hence we are wide open, vulnerable and undiscerning receptacles of nonsensical industrial propaganda.

Somehow, we must find our way back through the smoke and mirrors, beyond the propaganda and misleading terminology, to a reawakening of interest and awareness of the precious nature of real forests. A wholesale rejection of the notion that forests are a source of ‘renewable energy’ is urgently needed as nations decide how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/File:Table_1-Share_of_renewables_in_gross_inland_energy_consumption_2016.png
 [2] http://task40.ieabioenergy.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/IEA-Wood-Pellet-Study_final-2017-06.pdf
 [3] https://www.southernenvironment.org/uploads/maps/SELC_WoodPelletExportMap_2017_0707_map+table.pdf
 [4] <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/enviva-wood-pellets-FS.pdf>
 [5] <https://www.southernenvironment.org/news-and-press/press-releases/statement-from-selc-on-new-report-assessing-threats-to-southeast-wildlife>
 [6] <https://www.drax.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Drax-Group-plc-annual-report-and-accounts-2016-Smart-Energy-Solutions.pdf> p18
 [7] Drax burned 6.6 million tonnes of pellets in 2016 (<https://www.drax.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Drax-Group-plc-annual-report-and-accounts-2016-Smart-Energy-Solutions.pdf>), made from 13.2 million tonnes of green wood. By comparison, the UK's total wood production that year was 11 million tonnes of green wood, according to the Forestry Commission (<https://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7aqqdc>).
 [8] Burning 6.6 million tonnes of pellets generated 12.7 TWh of electricity in 2016 (<https://www.drax.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Drax-Group-plc-annual-report-and-accounts-2016-Smart-Energy-Solutions.pdf>). The UK's total electricity use in 2016 was 303.8 TWh (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/633029/DUKES_2017_Press_Notice.pdf), so Drax's biomass supplied 4.2% of UK electricity that year. However, electricity contributed just 17.5% of the UK's final energy demand that year. So Drax's biomass contributed 0.74% of the UK's final energy demand in 2016.
 [9] <http://www.pfpi.net/carbon-emissions>
 [10] <https://www.drax.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Drax-Group-plc-annual-report-and-accounts-2016-Smart-Energy-Solutions.pdf> p128
 [11] <https://eutoday.net/news/energy/2018/scientists-urge-eu-to-revise-renewable-energy-directive>
 [12] <http://biofutureplatform.org/statements/>
 [13] Bradley CM, Hanson CT and DellaSala DA (2016). Does increased forest protection correspond to higher fire severity in frequent-fire forests of the western United States? *Ecosphere* 7(10): e01492. 10.1002/ecs2.1492
 [14] <https://www.williamsnews.com/news/2017/nov/07/house-approves-bill-speed-logging-combat-wildfires>



Palm oil and land grabbing in Cameroon

By Center for Environment and Development (CED), Cameroon

The financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent growth in the demand for land in sub-Saharan Africa by transnational corporations led to a rush for land in Cameroon. Companies like Sime Darby, the Siva Group/Biopalm Energy, Goodhope, Palmco, and SGSOC/Herakles all started requesting large areas of land for palm oil production.

Many of these companies were from Asia, which is a global leader in palm oil production. In Cameroon, a total amount of 3 to 4 million hectares was reportedly being claimed by these companies. [1] In comparison, the size of existing agro-industrial plantations for all commodities in Cameroon was just 350,000 hectares at the time. Many of these claims remain unconfirmed, but SGSOC/Herakles, a New York based company,

entered into a contract with the Government of Cameroon for 73,000 hectares of land. It was the first in a new wave of land acquisitions, and CED was particularly active on this case because of the lessons that could be drawn from it to inform advocacy work on the requested changes in the land law, especially regarding the provisions on large scale land concessions.

SGSOC/Herakles was the largest signed land deal in Cameroon at the time, and at least four lessons were learned from this case:

1. The issue of legality. The company claimed to have a contract for 73,000 ha but was never able to provide evidence of the size and location of the land that had been granted to them by the Government of Cameroon. They had a very detailed framework agreement with Cameroon, specifying the purpose (palm oil plantation), the rent (0.5-1 dollar per hectare per year), the length of the concession (99 years), the cession of carbon rights to the



A newly-planted palm oil plantation in Cameroon. Center for Environment and Development

company [2] (even though Cameroon did not have in place legislation to this effect), and a diversity of other details, but neither the location nor the size were specified.

2. The complexity of the contract, which included so many detailed obligations for the host State, giving the impression that the contract was an asset in itself, and that the purpose was to pave the way for a future arbitration case.
3. The lack of appropriate consultation with communities, and intimidation of community members either by the company or by the local administrative authorities and security forces. In some cases, the judiciary seemed to be privy to the harassment of community members or local activists during land transfers. [3] This trend gave the sad impression of a return to colonialism where land could be taken by force from those needing it the most, without any due consideration for their livelihood or their future.
4. The quality of environmental and social standard requirements was poor. One of the land concessions claimed by the company was located in the middle of an ecologically sensitive area of four national parks or proposed national parks.



Deforestation for palm oil in Cameroon. Center for Environment and Development

The deal was obviously not a good one for the Cameroonian State, and NGOs were openly questioning why future land cessions should follow the path of the SGSOC concession. The conclusion of our findings was that the laws in Cameroon were not strong enough to regulate this new rush for lands. The legislation should include clearer provisions to protect the rights of communities and give them the priority over land and natural resources management. Environmental standards should be drastically improved as well, together with standards that protect the national development interests of the State.

The successful campaign to voice the concerns of communities and provide additional arguments based on research conducted by CED and its partners, brought together a number of NGOs in

Cameroon and abroad, and led to a reduction in the size of the claimed concession (from 73,000 ha to 20,000 ha). [4] It also succeeded in replacing the claim with a provisional land lease, to be renewed subject to the performance of the company.

CED has since been active in the ongoing discussion on the palm oil policy in Cameroon.

[1] <http://pubs.iied.org/17571IIED/>

[2] <http://www.relufa.org/savesite/documents/13REASONSCED-RELUFAdocENGLISHTRANSLATION.pdf>

[3] <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/complaint-before-us-govt-alleging-intimidation-by-sgsocherakles-farms-in-land-transfers-in-cameroon-resolved-in-agreement-between-company-ngos>

[4] <http://www.bad-ag.info/bad-ag-campaigner-arbitrarily-detained-in-cameroon/>

Biofuels for aviation: about to take off?

By **Almuth Ernsting**, Biofuelwatch, Scotland



The idea of using biofuels in aircraft has barely moved beyond publicity stunts so far, but there is a risk that this could change in coming years. [1]

Airlines including United Airlines, Qantas, KLM, Lufthansa and Cathay Pacific have staged widely advertised flights fuelled with blends of kerosene and biofuels. Yet there is still only one refinery in the world which regularly produces biofuels suitable for aviation and even that one, operated by AltAir in California, sells less than 7% of its biofuels to airlines.

Nevertheless, the International Air Transport Association, the

European Commission, the US government, and the International Civil Aviation Organization, ICAO (a specialised UN organisation) have all been promoting the rapid expansion of biofuel use in aircraft for years. Neither biodiesel nor ethanol, which together account for 95% of global biofuel production at present, are compatible with aeroplane engines. So far, producing biofuels that can be safely used in aircraft has been prohibitively expensive. This could

change in 2018, with an expected technical ruling that would allow the fastest-growing type of all biofuels—Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO)—to be used in aircraft without the expensive upgrade currently required. Palm oil is by far the cheapest and technically most suitable HVO feedstock, and thus the only feasible source of aviation biofuels, should this market take off.

Growth in HVO production is the main reason why the EU's use of palm oil for biofuels increased sixfold between 2010 and 2015. [2]

Two large new palm oil HVO refineries are due to open this year, one operated by Total in France, the other by Eni in Italy. The Finnish oil company Neste, which produces more HVO than all other companies together, will also increase its capacity by one million tonnes, using palm oil in the mix. All those companies hope to cash in on a future aviation biofuel boom too. So far, no airline wants to be seen to use palm oil, but

Open burning in a newly cleared rainforest for a palm oil plantation in West Kalimantan, Borneo. **David Gilbert** for Rainforest Action Network/Flickr



Jetstar CEO shows off the airline's first flight using 50% biofuels. Jetstar Airways/Flickr



companies like Neste are getting around this by controversially classifying a fraction of crude palm oil as ‘wastes and residues’.

In addition, this push for aviation biofuels comes at a time when palm oil biofuel use is set to increase steeply anyway, due to new mandates in Indonesia, and plans to ramp up biodiesel use in Malaysia, Thailand, China, Japan and Norway. Palm oil use in EU biofuels could grow significantly as well, if aggressive Malaysian and Indonesian government and industry lobbying prevents an EU Parliament decision—in favour of stopping support for palm oil in

biofuels—from being translated into policy.

Fortunately, large-scale aviation biofuels are not inevitable. Last October, just before an ICAO ‘Conference on Aviation and Alternative Fuels’, 96 civil society organisations endorsed an Open Letter against a proposal for high aviation biofuel targets made by the ICAO Secretariat. [3] The conference ended without any biofuel targets being adopted at all. The industry hasn’t given up, of course, and in June this year a new ICAO Secretariat proposal will be put before delegates, this time to make it as easy as possible for

airlines to achieve ‘carbon neutral growth’ with the help of biofuels as well as carbon offsets.

Preventing this new market for palm oil is vital if we are to avoid yet more deforestation. But the answer cannot be to allow the aviation industry to keep expanding by burning ever more fossil fuels. It must be to reverse the growth in aviation, resist airport expansions, move subsidies from planes to trains, and for people to fly less if at all.

[1] <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2017/aviation-biofuels/>
 [2] <http://www.animus-csr.com/2017/01/23/the-real-impact-of-palm-oil-and-failed-policies/>
 [3] <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2017/aviation-biofuels-open-letter/>



Natural pine forests rich in biodiversity threatened by logging in Sweden

By Kristina Bäck and Skydda Skogen, Protect the Forest, Sweden

The Ore Forest Landscape is an extensive forest landscape, much of it unprotected natural pine forest. Despite its high conservation values having been documented, the area is threatened by logging.

Most of the forest is managed by the state-owned and FSC-certified forest company Sveaskog, which has already logged more than 600 hectares of unprotected pine forests with high conservation values within the Ore Forest Landscape since 2013, and plans to continue logging it. Sveaskog sells sawlogs, pulpwood for pulp and paper, and wood for biofuels. [1] Since December 2017 volunteers have been guarding the forest in an effort to prevent them from being logged.

In the Ore Forest Landscape, several forest areas with high conservation values are scheduled for logging. The Swedish Forest Agency—the authority whose duty it is to balance production and environment goals—refuses to survey key woodland habitats even after being informed of the rich biodiversity in these forest areas.

In one of the threatened forests, a tent has been set up for the volunteers who guard the forest from logging. These volunteers come from several organisations, such as Greenpeace, Protect the Forest and The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC). A list with 400 findings of 27 red-listed species provides clear proof of the

high conservation values, and the NGOs have proposed to the County Administrative Board of Dalarna that the area be turned into a nature reserve. Sadly, this wish has been ignored by the authorities.

In a recent film by Greenpeace [2], the urgent situation in the Ore Forest Landscape is described by Linda Spjut from [Protect the Forest](#): “Sveaskog should support the fulfillment of the [Swedish Environmental Objectives](#). Sveaskog’s logging plans in this

Ore Forest Landscape, there are plans to log this natural pine forest. Sebastian Kirppu



forest are a scandal. I think many more Swedes would join the protest if they knew what is going on in their forests.”

Also, in the same film, Greenpeace’s Daniel Zetterström says: “We who protest against the logging, demand that Sveaskog withdraws all their plans to log forests with high conservation values in Ore Forest Landscape, and in the rest of Sweden. We want the Swedish Forest Agency to carry out an inventory in these forests, and that the government takes action to protect these areas.”

Moreover, Nature and Youth’s Linda Johannesson says: “It’s weird that state-owned Sveaskog proceeds with logging in biologically rich forests when at the same time our environmental objectives state that forests like these are the

ones that should be spared. Areas of natural pine forest this large hardly exist anymore this far south.”

Sebastian Kirppu, a forest biologist who has been deeply involved in the voluntary inventory of the forests, says: “The Swedish Forest Agency has based its assessment of the forest on one single field visit, without doing any proper inventory of woodland key habitats.” To Radio P4 Dalarna he says “We have a forestry industry which is FSC-certified, and therefore they should

help prevent red-listed species from disappearing. The forest companies have a so-called ‘sector responsibility’ which means that they should avoid logging in forests with high conservation values, rich in biodiversity. There are also authorities which are responsible for ensuring that Sweden achieves our Environmental Objectives and international agreements made with the UN, like the Aichi Target agreed in the Nagoya meeting in 2010. All these efforts are reduced to nothing when forests like these, which are

landscapes into monocultural plantations will lead to irreversible loss of biodiversity. By logging these forests, the Swedish Environmental Objectives cannot be properly achieved. Protecting the existing forests with high nature values is therefore a far more cost-effective measure for attaining these objectives than having to restore and re-create lost habitats.”

The threatened forests of the Ore Forest Landscape are just one example of what is going on in

Sweden. There are several other unprotected natural forests with high conservation values, and thus rich biodiversity, which are planned for logging. The last remnants of forests that have never been clear-cut before are now being cut down. At present, only about 5% of Sweden’s



productive forest land is legally protected. Below the mountainous forest border, only 2% is legally protected. More than 90% of Sweden’s forests are, or have been, commercially used and are hence affected by systematic forest management.

Recently, 22 organisations wrote an open letter to the Swedish government demanding that logging should be halted in Ore Forest Landscape, and that the forests need to be legally protected. The letter [3] states:

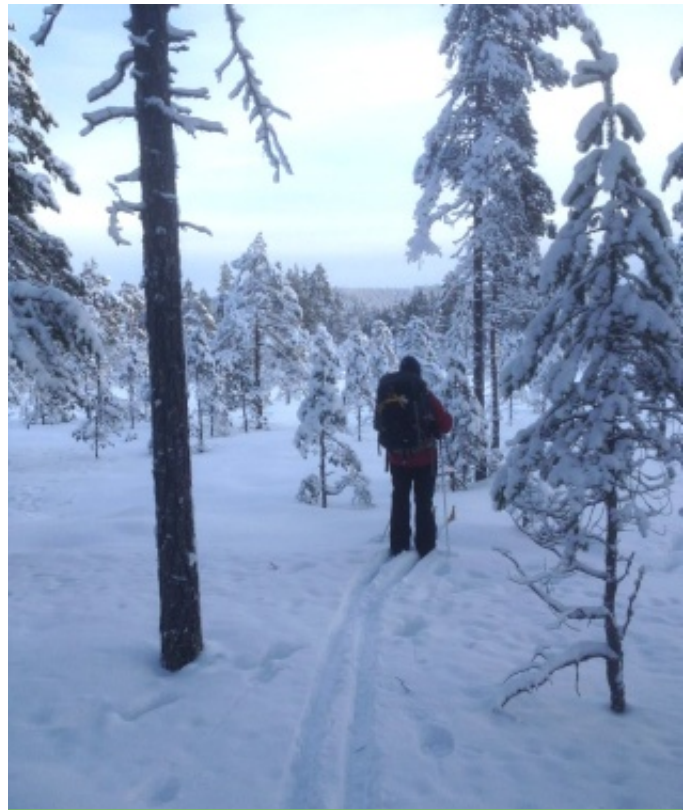
“The logging in these forests and hence the transformation from biologically important forest

landscapes into monocultural plantations will lead to irreversible loss of biodiversity. By logging these forests, the Swedish Environmental Objectives cannot be properly achieved. Protecting the existing forests with high nature values is therefore a far more cost-effective measure for attaining these objectives than having to restore and re-create lost habitats.”

In addition to this, appropriate care is lacking when logging is done. There is a consensus among Sweden’s leading biology scientists that the Swedish forest policy is threatening the biological diversity.



A tent for volunteers protecting the Ore Forest Landscape. **Pär Wetterrot**



A volunteer patrolling the Ore Forest Landscape to prevent illegal logging. **Pär Wetterrot**

In spite of this the Swedish government is advocating increased forest production and the use of bioenergy to replace fossil fuels. They listen to the timber industry that argues that forests should be clear-cut in order to mitigate climate change. This idea happens to coincide with the industry's business interest. They bluntly state on a [campaign website](#) that the more wood products you buy, the better for the climate. The fact that logging natural forests and burning them for energy will actually worsen the climate situation is not mentioned.

A large proportion of the forests logged in Sweden are exported as raw material, paper, pulp and other wood products to countries such as UK, Germany and USA. Customers in these countries usually receive guarantees from the Swedish forest industry that these products are produced in a sustainable way. Protect the Forest testifies that Swedish forest companies' operations are frequently far from being sustainable, either environmentally or socially, especially in relation to the local population. There are numerous

examples of FSC-certified companies logging old-growth forests with high conservation values and violating other criteria in the environmental certification rules. We therefore urge all concerned and customers in the countries that import forest products from Sweden to acquaint themselves with and to highlight the situation of the Swedish forests. We have to stop the destruction of Europe's last old-growth forests and in order to do this we need to cooperate internationally.

[1] <https://www.sveaskog.se/en/about-sveaskog/sveaskog-in-brief/>

[2] [http://media.greenpeace.org/archive/Action-to-Protect-Swedish-Forest-Landscape-Ore-Skogsrike-\(Soundbites\)-27MZIFJXI70MD.html](http://media.greenpeace.org/archive/Action-to-Protect-Swedish-Forest-Landscape-Ore-Skogsrike-(Soundbites)-27MZIFJXI70MD.html)

[3] <http://www.skyddaskogen.se/sv/arkiv/154-svenska-kategori/aktuellt/pressmeddelanden/4536-oepet-brev-till-mikael-damberg-karolina-skog-om-ore-skogsrike9241>

Booming trade in biofuels and biomass devastating the Czech Republic's wetlands, farms and forests



By Zdeněk Poštulka, Koalice pro řeky, Czech Republic

The overexploitation of soils in former Czechoslovakia dates back to the 1950s, when collectivisation and the intensification of agriculture started to take their toll, devastating the landscape. Hedgerows and forests were cut down in an attempt to make larger fields, and wetlands were drained.

Infrastructure designed to control rivers was also rapidly expanded: although such works were already underway at the end of the 19th century, renewed efforts to dam rivers and make hard concrete embankments became part of an approach based on the idea that “we will command water and wind”.

During the 1970s, works on land reclamation—mostly draining wetlands and floodplains and converting them to arable land—proceeded rapidly, as policies

prioritised arable farming. This newly drained arable farmland was created to compensate for land lost to concrete in the form of roads, the extension of settlements, etc. But these changes resulted in extensive erosion and water pollution, as well as the overproduction of food.

Since the beginning of the 20th century the Czech Republic has lost around a million hectares of wetlands, floodplain forests and agroforestry systems. [1] Drainage and other actions that harm the

water regime have taken place across 1.1 million hectares of agricultural lands. 25.6% of the country's agricultural soils has been drained, mostly by underground tubing drainage systems. [2]

Soil erosion is a serious problem, with 67% of our arable soil endangered by erosion, and 21 million tons of topsoil lost due to erosion every year. Oilseed rape farming loomed, and after the transition to free market economics in 1990 we started to export biofuel

Logging in spruce forests increases soil erosion. Koalice pro řeky



feedstock commodities (such as rape and wheat) to countries in Western Europe. The new business had begun.

Our lowlands have since been subjected to the specialised production of biofuel crops and also maize for the production of biogas, which is used to produce electricity. This has been accompanied by a reduction in livestock farming, as agriculture companies focused mostly on these crops, and chemical fertilisers have been used instead of manure. Crop rotation favouring rape, maize and wheat also led to a rapid increase in the use of pesticides. Thus, groundwater in our lowlands is poisoned by glyphosates and other pesticide and fertiliser residues.

Nowadays, we need to set aside at least 400,000 ha of degraded arable fields for the restoration of our landscape through the introduction of agroforestry systems and the restoration of wetlands and floodplains. However, biofuels production continues to be incentivised by national and EU-wide policies. Under such circumstances we are doomed. Although the European Parliament recently voted to end EU support for biofuels from oil palm from 2021 (pending an overall EU decision), it still left all the other food crop biofuels on the table. Since oil palm forms such a high proportion of first generation biofuels in the EU (33%), [3] the EU's demand for rape, wheat, soy and sugar cane can be expected to rise substantially, should the European Parliament's vote stand.

The production of wood biomass is also a pressing concern. Remains of



Damage to wetland environments caused by logging. **Koalice pro řeky**



Transporting wood in floodplain plantations degrades water courses. **Koalice pro řeky**

our 'close to nature' beech forests were destroyed in the 18th century when wood was used to power all kinds of early industrialisation. Due to prevailing ideas from the Austrian forestry school, natural forests were replaced by spruce monoculture plantations. Nowadays, however, these spruce plantations frequently die due to dry summers, storms and infestations of bark beetle. The beetle infestations in northern Moravia have reached unprecedented levels. Thousands of hectares of trees have been damaged and heavy machinery is being used to fight the bark beetle outbreak.

The wood is then exported to Poland and Austria, countries dependent on biomass to reach their sustainable energy targets. Poland's example is particularly shocking, as they use co-firing of wood and coal in old coal power plants as a main tool for achieving their sustainable energy targets. Even when we have policies in place trying to protect our forest soils and promote 'close to nature' forestry, we can hardly prevent this dash for energy biomass in neighbouring states.

Exporting this wood conflicts with our needs. We need to leave dead



A natural floodplain. **Koalice pro řeky**



A coppiced woodland. **Koalice pro řeky**

wood on the spot in the damaged mountain catchments, to prevent soil erosion, enhance soil fertility, and enable stream and wetland restoration. Our mountain forests should be protected.

With regard to crop production for biofuels, the EU ending support for first generation biofuels would be a positive step. Rape prices might then decrease, and so would the pressure on our landscape. Then we could more easily acquire land for the restoration of damaged ecosystems.

To achieve responsible and sustainable biomass production, we propose the replanting of up to 150,000 ha of floodplain forests, preferably on arable soils with five years flood return frequency; 50,000 ha of agroforestry systems; and 200,000 ha of hedgerows and wetlands on vulnerable arable soils, orchards, and poplar-willow stands, or reed beds, partly as non-intervention forest for permanent carbon sequestration. We also propose the conversion of approximately 200,000 ha of the most vulnerable spruce plantations to near-natural forests within the next 10 years—providing an interim source of biomass—until newly-established coppice is ready for the first harvest for local use.

[1] http://www.hnutiduha.cz/sites/default/files/publikace/typo3/voda_zemedelstvi.pdf

[2] http://www.hydomeliorace.cz/projekty/ishms/mapserv/pomoc/i_vekodv_p.htm

[3] https://www.transportenvironment.org/newsroom/blog/will-eu-call-palm-oil-nations-bluff?utm_source=T%26E+alert+emails&utm_campaign=2de064b7b1-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_48950a8d32-2de064b7b1-119699241

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Less meat, more forest: Brighter Green's work in China

By Wanqing Zhou, Brighter Green, USA

Brighter Green, a New York-based public policy action tank, has been working with colleagues in developing countries on facilitating changes to decrease the consumption of animal-based foods, in order to reduce the impacts that these foods have on our climate, ecosystems, public health, socio-economic development, and animal welfare. China, where the market and multifaceted challenges have reached unprecedented scales, is a focus for Brighter Green.

To present the issue, Brighter Green worked with Chinese documentary filmmaker Jian Yi to create “*What’s for Dinner?*” (in 2009) and its follow-up piece “*Six Years On*” (in 2015), the first documentary series on the meat issue in China. [1] In 2016 Jian and Brighter Green colleagues visited North Carolina after Hurricane Matthew to document the damage done to factory farms and the environmental impacts of the overflowing lagoons. Many of these farms are owned by China-based pork multinational WH Group. From a charter flight, some of the footage was live-streamed to a Chinese news portal, getting over 77,000 views. [2]

These documentaries are complemented by comprehensive research. In 2011, Brighter Green released a policy paper, “Skillful Means: The Challenges of China’s

Encounter with Factory Farming” [3], which explores the multifaceted impacts of industrial animal agriculture on China. In 2015, Brighter Green published a discussion paper, “The Triangle: The Evolution and Future of Industrial Animal Agriculture in the U.S., China, and Brazil”, [4] which highlights the deforestation caused by the globalised meat and feed industry. It explores the “triangle of

factory farming” linking the world’s three biggest players in the meat industry—the US, China, and Brazil—and analysing the dynamics shaping this triangle. These dynamics include industrial-scale cattle ranching and growing soybeans for animal feed, which contribute to extensive deforestation in countries such as Brazil and Paraguay.

The Good Food Roadshow team with participants at one of the workshops in Beijing. Brighter Green



In terms of public engagement, since the kick-start of the screening tour of “What’s for Dinner?” in 2014, Brighter Green and colleagues have been building a network in China around the meat issue and its environmental and animal welfare impacts. Today, the official account on WeChat (the most popular social media app in China) has more than 6,000 subscribers, and two of the monthly live chats have featured Brazil-based researchers talking about the connection between meat and feed production, deforestation, and climate change.

In 2017, Brighter Green worked with the Good Food Fund to advance the work in China on awareness raising, institutional outreach, and original research, through the following projects:

1. Good Food Academy: a Chinese-based website [5] that educates users about the impacts of industrial agriculture, especially factory farming. The team worked with leading international organisations in this field to translate and share cutting-edge reports.
2. Good Food Roadshow: a workshop tour [6] where the team worked with plant-based chefs from the US and local farmers from 20 Chinese cities to educate the public about the true cost of the industrial food system, and the benefits of cooking healthy plant-based

The final Good Food Roadshow workshop in Nanchang. Brighter Green



Vegan Energizing Nutty Bread made with local ingredients at Good Food Roadshow workshop in Taipei. Brighter Green

foods using fresh, local ingredients.

3. Good Food Hero Summit: a symposium [7] where international experts on food systems, nutrition, ethics, and indigenous culture were joined by 100 Chinese food activists to inspire research and action on reducing animal-based food consumption and promoting a better food system.

In 2018, Brighter Green plans to further its work to reduce meat consumption in China, including advancing the Good Food Academy website, holding the second Good Food Hero Summit, collaborating with Yale Hospitality to promote a healthier and more responsible dining policy in Chinese educational institutions, and conducting research on China’s food movement and industrial animal-based food industry.

[1] <http://wfdinner.com/home/>
 [2] <https://www.facebook.com/BrighterGreen/posts/10154760537161177>
 [3] <http://brightergreen.org/china/>
 [4] <http://brightergreen.org/the-triangle/>
 [5] <http://www.goodfoodchina.net/>
 [6] <http://www.goodfoodchina.net/roadshow.php>
 [7] <http://www.goodfoodchina.net/summit.php>

What is being sacrificed for your premium piece of steak?

By Mary Louise Malig, Global Forest Coalition, Bolivia



There are numerous initiatives the world over asking consumers to reduce the amount of meat they consume. Some campaigns aim to ease change slowly but surely, by convincing consumers to have one day in the week when they do not eat meat. Many Catholics, by giving up meat for the season of Lent (40 days of sacrifice and reflection), signify that eating meat is important to them and that it is a sacrifice to give it up. But what is really being sacrificed to give you that piece of steak? It turns out the price is steep, it's not just the animals themselves, it includes our forests and our climate as well.

Pan out to the bigger picture, and look at the lengths that countries and corporations go to, negotiating trade agreements, deals and tariffs, and many more, around beef. Where will cattle be raised? How much beef can be produced and sold? What might a country be ready to exchange in return for increased market access for beef exports? For the European Union and the regional Mercosur bloc—comprised of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay—negotiations are very much

focused on beef, and who gives and gains what in return, in beef and in a whole range of other sectors from services to government procurement. It has taken them 20 years of stop-go talks, and they have yet to reach a deal. All this might be about to change however. In recent months, the EU-Mercosur agreement has been gaining momentum, moving ahead in a seeming rush to close the deal and sign it.

A news article about the recent rounds of negotiations said: **“At its heart, any agreement will depend on beef and ethanol—but mainly the beef. If Europe agrees to buy enough prime Latin American beef at low tariff levels, Mercosur will drop tariffs on leading EU exports such as cars and machinery.”** [1] What Mercosur wants is to export prime meat to the EU. This with ethanol is one of its biggest ambitions. When one hears this one could think that the

Deforestation for cattle ranching in the Chaco, Paraguay. Miguel Lovera/Iniciativa Amatocodie, Paraguay



A brief guide to the on-off EU-Mercosur Agreement negotiations

Why is a deal that was being negotiated on and off since 1999 with the coming into force of the Cooperation Framework Agreement, suddenly the subject of a frenzied race to reach an agreement in 2018? And more importantly, what are both sides aiming to get out of this deal?

Mercosur is a South American trade bloc established by the Treaty of Asunción in 1991 and the Protocol of Ouro Preto in 1994. Its full members are Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. Venezuela is also a full member but has been suspended since 1 December 2016. Associate countries are Bolivia, Chile, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador.

The current negotiations are between the European Union, a 28-nation bloc, and the founding members of Mercosur: Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

The early negotiations did not really have any common ground that the two blocs could reach. The EU

considered Mercosur as too developed so it did not qualify for the Special and Differential Treatment afforded to developing and least developed countries in trade negotiations. The EU's quotas restricting agricultural imports were a point of contention for Mercosur, and on the other side, the EU was dissatisfied with Mercosur's offers on the automotive sector. This stalemate continued from 2004 to 2010, when negotiations briefly resumed, only to be paused again in 2012, and then restarted in 2016.

Mercosur is one of the world's leading exporters of bovine meat. Their exports to the world have jumped since 2004. In 2017, they placed 2 million tons of fresh beef on the international market accounting for around US\$ 9 billion at an average price of US\$ 4,538/t. The main markets for Mercosur's bovine meat include China, Russia and others. But the EU is of particular interest because it's a good destination for prime beef.

entire economy of Mercosur depends on meat exports and that this is crucial for the future of Mercosur and its people. However, a deeper look reveals that this actually reflects the interests of the large agribusinesses in those countries who wield a lot of influence.

Meat is an important export for Mercosur, but it's not its only export. The total exports of Mercosur to the world are US\$ 221 billion and the exports of meat to the world are US\$ 9 billion. Exports to the EU were around US\$ 42 billion and meat exports were around US\$ 1 billion. A quota may or may not boost the meat industry of Mercosur but it is definitely being used by Mercosur to justify the importance of the deal. However, to exchange this meat

quota which is rather small when looked at from a macro perspective, for something so much more significant such as government procurement, services and a host of other measures, is not a win at all.

Going into the specifics of the current negotiations, the maximum quota that Mercosur might achieve for beef would be something in the region of 100,000 tonnes. From a macro perspective, and considering the value and quantity of their existing meat exports, this is not such a significant win—unless, you are looking at this negotiation from the perspective of the large cattle farmers and other meat-related corporations in Mercosur who stand to benefit the most from this deal.

The singular drive to increase meat production by Mercosur governments strikes fear into the hearts of those who have already witnessed and continue to witness the large-scale destruction of forests, biodiversity, ecosystems, communities, human health and animals, as a result of unsustainable industrial livestock and feedstock farming spreading across the countries of Mercosur and neighbouring countries in South America.

As many studies have already shown, with case studies and on the ground accounts, the sector brings in its wake a range of direct and indirect negative impacts including massive deforestation to make way for cattle ranching and monoculture soy plantations, and the widespread displacement and

Protesters target the WTO in Buenos Aires, Argentina. FueraOMC



dispossession of land of communities, forest dependent peoples and Indigenous Peoples, as well as human health and animal welfare impacts. [2] For example, the 2016 State of the World's Forests report refers to an analysis in seven South American countries which found that 71% of deforestation between 1990 and 2005 was driven by increased demand for land while in Brazil the figure was even higher, at 80%.

Within the EU, Irish and French farmers had been ringing alarm bells about the impacts that increased imports of beef from Mercosur would have on small farmers in these countries. For

example in September 2017 the chairman of the Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers' Association said: **"The ICSA is extremely concerned at this. If such an offer (85,000 tonnes of beef for Mercosur to the EU) is tabled it would have a very severe impact on European beef markets and would hit Irish beef exports particularly hard."**

[3] On 21 February 2018 French farmers held tractor protests to voice similar concerns to Macron. [4]

Furthermore, the EU-Mercosur deal is an extremely lop-sided deal. It seems set to give away much of Mercosur's sovereignty—in the form of its intellectual property

rights, its services, its government procurement and so much more—in exchange for selling an increased amount of premium beef.

It's time to listen to the deafening chorus of peoples' voices opposing this deal. Actions must be taken to put pressure on decision-makers and governments to stop them signing the disastrous EU-Mercosur deal.

[1] <https://www.politico.eu/article/mercosur-eu-deal-faces-race-against-the-clock/>

[2] Case studies from Brazil, Bolivia, India, Paraguay and Russia can be seen in our report "What's at Steak" <http://globalforestcoalition.org/whats-steak-real-cost-meat/>

[3] <http://en.mercopress.com/2017/09/19/irish-and-french-farmers-warn-about-mercosur-eu-beef-negotiations>

[4] <https://af.reuters.com/article/africaTech/idAFL8N1QB4P6>