

Media Briefing



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Killing Fields: the battle to feed Europe's factory farms

Summary

Few people realise that a hidden chain of destruction stretches from factory farms in Europe to the forests of South America – where huge soy plantations are wiping out wildlife and worsening the effects of climate change. Soy, mostly grown to feed chickens, cows and pigs in Europe, now covers nearly 11 million hectares in South America – an area equivalent to all the arable farmland in Germany – and demand is growing fast.

To make way for soy plantations, thousands of people are being forced from their land and with it, losing their ability to grow their own food. Indigenous people are being evicted and forests are being cleared.

Many of the soybeans are genetically modified and massively increase the use of pesticides – poisoning rural communities, water sources and the natural environment.

Meanwhile, in Europe, small-scale farming that is good for people and the environment is losing out to big business. Friends of the Earth believes that if the European Union is serious about addressing climate change, global loss of biodiversity, human rights, and dealing with the food crisis, it must urgently reduce its dependence on soy imports.

Introduction

Soy production is one of the biggest drivers of deforestation in South America and is associated with widespread environmental degradation, increased pesticide use, violence and human rights abuses of local communities and farmers, and rising food insecurity. As Europe is the leading importer of soy from South America, it has a key role in soy expansion.

Total soy area for EU animal feeds	
Country of origin	Hectares
United States	781,256
Canada	182,290
Argentina	4,240,559
Brazil	4,995,608
Paraguay	263,553
Uruguay	26,319
Other countries	76,791
Total	10,566,376

"Every river and water source of what used to be forests and is now soy plantations is dead. They are poisoned, mainly due to the intensive use of agrochemicals... At the same time, the indigenous communities who had traditionally lived in these Atlantic forests especially the Guarani'I m'gba' people were displaced"

Elias Diaz Pena, Sobrevivencia, Paraguay

The devastating impact on people

Great swathes of South America, previously used for staple food crops, have been given over to soy production. For example, with soy expansion, the land area devoted to cultivating food crops in Argentina has reduced dramatically. The area used for the cultivation of rice has reduced by 44%, maize by 26%, wheat by 3% and sunflower 34%. This is linked to a significant increase in the price of staple foods: 130% for rice and 272% for lentils.

Smallholder farmers and indigenous communities are displaced from their land. This destroys diversified small farming systems which are responsible for a large proportion of the food staples consumed. Therefore expansion of soy has brought about land concentration and a progressive reduction of the number of family farms, thus reducing food security.

“Here we had water, streams, crops, big trees. Now everything is destroyed. I think we, the Kaiowa indigenous people, are going to die, our race is going to end here”

Getulio De Oliveira, Leader of Guarani Kaiowa people EI

Community groups in Paraguay estimate that 90,000 families are forced from their ancestral lands every year to make way for soy plantations.

Globally, growing feeds for animals uses a third of global arable land. Demand for livestock products puts pressure on land to grow feeds, mostly soy, and has been identified as a cause of the recent food crisis. With its high per capita use of land and dependence on imports of feeds, the EU is responsible for driving up global food prices.

Soy: Driving deforestation

Soy production in South America has more than doubled in the last 15 years. Brazil is the world's 2nd largest exporter and more than half of Brazil's soy production is in the centre and south of the country, on land that was once covered by natural habitat. About 16% of the Amazon forests and 60% of the Cerrado grasslands have already been lost. After falling deforestation rates in 2007, the recent soy price boom has fuelled an increase in deforestation, with more than 770,000 hectares of forest cleared between August 2007 and August 2008 alone. It is estimated that a further 9.6 million hectares of Cerrado could be lost to soy expansion by 2020 and 40% of Amazon rainforest by 2050.

Deforestation accounts for about a quarter of global CO₂ emissions. A significant proportion of this is emissions from deforestation for grazing and growing feed – mainly in rich forests in South America. Reducing emissions from deforestation will therefore be essential in order to achieve the objective of limiting global warming to 2 degrees Centigrade. Deforestation has taken centre stage at global climate talks and the EU has committed to halting global forest cover loss by 2030, at the latest, and to reducing gross tropical deforestation by at least 50% by 2020 compared to current levels.

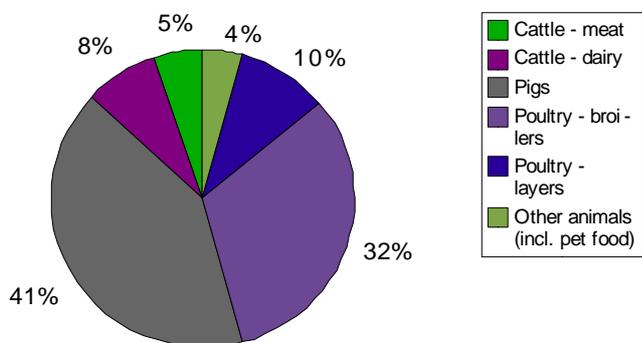
FoE believes that the EU will fail to meet these targets without addressing one of the root causes of global deforestation – the consumption of animal feeds.

Soy: Feeding European factory farms

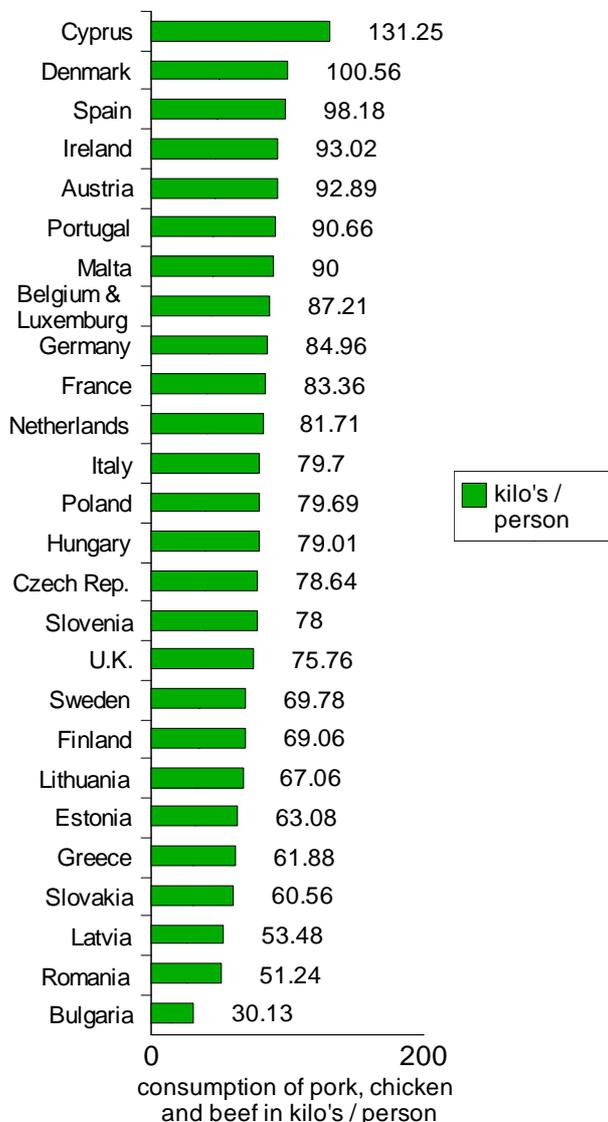
Europe is by far the largest importer of soymeal in the world, and the 2nd largest importer of soybeans. Much of the soy is from South America. In 2007 33% of Brazil's harvest and 32% of Argentina's was destined for Europe, where it is used as a cheap and protein rich animal feed in factory farms across the continent. The largest user of soy in the EU is intensive pork farming followed by poultry.

Germany, France and the United Kingdom use the most land for soy production: 4.5 million hectares to maintain their current diets. People living in Cyprus, Spain and Denmark eat the largest amount of meat and dairy products per capita in the EU.

Consumption of soy meal by livestock sector



Meat consumption per capita



Genetically modified soy

European consumers are kept in the dark about the fact that the vast majority of this soy is genetically modified (GM) as the current labelling laws do not apply to products from animals fed with GM crops.

The majority of soy in Latin America is grown from Monsanto's genetically modified (GM) seed known as Roundup Ready, genetically modified to tolerate Monsanto's Roundup (glyphosate) herbicide. Government data now confirms that reliance on GM has led to the emergence of herbicide-tolerant weeds. As a result, increased quantities of Roundup, as well as older and more damaging herbicides like 2,4-D (a component of the infamous Agent Orange) and Atrazine (which is banned in the EU for health reasons) have to be used. Glyphosate has become a major source of pollution that contaminates surface water and aquifers, threatens human health and kills other vegetation.

Grave health risks have been reported from pesticides that build up in the food chain, and aerial spraying of pesticides by large farms and agri-businesses. Communities living near soy plantations report severe health problems including continuous headaches, skin rashes, stomach problems, increased rates of miscarriage and babies born with malformations. Governmental data from the main soy producing countries clearly indicates that pesticide use does not decrease with the use of GM soy.

The solution to soy

Meanwhile, in Europe non-intensive farming that is good for people and the environment is losing out to big business. Most of the soy is traded by huge multi-national companies and used to feed livestock in factory farms. Trade agreements and agriculture policies prevent European farmers from growing their own crops to feed their livestock.

Farmers in the EU can grow alternatives such as peas, beans and lupins to feed livestock, but at

the moment these feeds cannot compete with cheap soy from South America, which is grown with huge external costs.

Friends of the Earth believes that if the European Union is serious about addressing climate change, global loss of biodiversity, human rights, and dealing with the food crisis it must urgently reduce its dependence on imports of soy and promote alternative, home grown animal feeds and grass-based meat and dairy systems. It must also support small scale and sustainable farming.

“Currently European farmers can’t compete with the cheap soy imports because the soy is produced at the cost of the environment and the poor in South America...”

Hanny Von Beek, Farmer and Chairperson
Dutch Arable Farming Union

Friends of the Earth, Food and Water Watch and European Co-ordination Via Campesina are calling on the European Union to:

- Cut support for factory farming and increase support for non-intensive animal production
- Reduce reliance on imported animal feed
- Support animal feed production in Europe
- Label all foods that come from animals fed genetically modified feeds

Friends of the Earth, Food and Water Watch and European Co-ordination Via Campesina is calling on all Governments around the world to:

- Support their citizens’ right to healthy, planet-friendly, local food
- Support peoples’ right to fair share of land and water
- Stop allowing big business to control the food chain
- Ban genetically modified foods and feeds

www.feedingfactoryfarms.org



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