

THE AVOIDABLE CRISIS

The European Meat Industry's
Environmental Catastrophe



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“As a producer from the Chaco, born and raised in the area, I don’t think that soy is food. To me, it’s a disease. Healthy foods are those from my father’s time, sweet potatoes, yucca, pumpkins...

Soy is for the big money pools, not for us.

They came to make us sick with soy here, in the Chaco, and I believe all over Argentina too...

They come, sow, poison, harvest and go away...

For me, soy is no good, not even as a food for the animals. It makes the animals sick...

The hens do not lay eggs, the meat has an awful taste. It’s not like the corn that we sow in the Chaco...

The planes [spraying herbicides] passed at 6:00am. They poisoned the water, the tank, the well and we drank it and the animals drank it. We ended up sick, my animals and I. **They made us sick.**”

– Catalina Cendra,
farmer from the Chaco, Argentina

Burn and forest boundary, Argentina.
Photo: Jim Wickens, Ecostorm





Sustainable. Locally grown. Organic. Some of the key things European consumers look for when purchasing meat, whether from grocery stores, fast food chains, or fine-dining restaurants. Europe is internationally known for its commitment to the environment and fighting climate change. But despite this public concern, there is still a business that continues to embody the recklessness of a bygone era of pollution and destruction: the European meat industry. Meat consumption in Europe has increased, on average each person consumed about 32 kg of pork, 24 kg of poultry, 11 kg of beef and 2 kg of lamb and mutton in 2016.¹

The meat industry relies on massive quantities of soy for animal feed to raise livestock: about 75% of the world's soy is used for animal feed. More than one million square kilometers of land are dedicated to growing soy,² an area almost three times the size of Germany.

Soy production is expanding across Latin America's agricultural frontier, a global hotspot for deforestation. Large companies like the American agribusinesses Cargill and Bunge are driving the destruction of ancient native ecosystems and the wildlife habitat they contain to make way for industrial soy monocultures.

Europe is a crucial market for this soy, the second largest market after China.³ European agriculture depends heavily on imported soy, which is used for production of dairy, eggs, pork, poultry and beef. Europe imported 46.8 million tons of soy and soybean products in 2016,⁴ 27.8 million tons of which came from Latin America. 8.8 million hectares are needed to grow the soy that is imported to the EU, an area larger than Austria.⁵ How that soy is grown determines the environmental impact of the meat consumed in Europe.

The food and beverage retail market is the largest manufacturing sector in Europe, with a turnover of 1,098 billion euros in 2015.⁶ Major European supermarket chains like Carrefour, Lidl, Tesco, Aldi, Marks and Spencer and Ahold Delhaize know that many consumers are concerned about the outsized ecological and health impact of meat consumption. As a result, they frequently market their meat and dairy products as sustainable and locally produced. While the chickens, pigs, and cows that they sell are normally raised in Europe, the feed consumed by the livestock often comes from thousands of miles away, and has a much bigger impact on the environment. As such, the locally grown labeling only represents half the truth about the origins of this meat.

To find out the real impact of European meat, we sent an investigative team thousands of kilometers away to South America's agricultural frontier, where the story of your worst begins. We documented how soy raised for European animal feed drives deforestation in

Argentina and Paraguay, two of the leading soy-producing countries in South America. This follows our previous investigation into large-scale deforestation for soy in the Brazilian Cerrado and Bolivian Amazon basin. Together, these four countries comprise the majority of Latin American soy production.

In this new investigation, our field team visited soy plantations across 4,200 kilometers of Argentina and Paraguay's Gran Chaco ecosystem and documented extensive destruction of natural ecosystems, including incidents of illegal deforestation.

The videos and photos included here show first-hand the deforestation happening to raise European meat. We also interviewed local community members to learn about the health impacts and social conflicts from these vast monocultures. We traced the soy from these production sites to the ports, where international traders bring it around the world, including over 30 million tons of soybeans and soybean meal per year on average from South America to Europe.⁷

The tragedy of the destruction we documented is that it is entirely avoidable. While meat is inherently resource-intensive to produce, it does not require the destruction of native ecosystems. There are more than 650 million hectares of previously cleared land across Latin America alone where soy and cattle can be raised without threatening native ecosystems. While not all of these degraded lands may be available for commodity agriculture, even a small percentage would easily meet projected soybean expansion years into the future, while providing an average benefit of \$1,140 per hectare.⁸ Technical experts administering a successful system that has virtually eliminated deforestation for soy in the Brazilian Amazon estimate that extending forest monitoring to other soy growing regions in Latin America, including the Gran Chaco, would cost only \$750,000 and \$1,000,000 to establish. That's just one seventy-thousandth of these companies' annual profit. Once the system is up and running, the annual cost would likely be cut in half.

So far, big soy companies like Cargill, Bunge, and ADM have yielded to inertia, and not seized this opportunity. However, the fact that reducing deforestation is affordable and technically feasible means that European companies can use their enormous power over the soy industry to demand an immediate end to destruction of native ecosystems for meat, and the feed that goes into it.



Gran Chaco, Paraguay
source: Yawar Motion Films

The Gran Chaco: --- The “Impenetrable” Forest

Across the landscapes we visited, we documented large agribusinesses bulldozing and burning thousands of hectares of the extraordinary ecosystem known as the Gran Chaco, a 110-million hectare region spanning Argentina, Bolivia, and Paraguay.⁹ The dry woodlands of the Chaco are one of the largest remaining continuous tracts of native vegetation in South America, second in size only to the great Amazon rainforest.

The forests of the Gran Chaco are home to a vibrant community of indigenous peoples, such as the Ayoreo, Chamacoco, Enxet, Guarayo, Maka’a, Manjuy, Mocoví, Nandeva, Nivakle, Toba Qom, and Wichi.¹⁰ Many are still hunter-gatherers and completely dependent on the forest. One of the most vulnerable groups are the Ayoreo indigenous people, some of which remain uncontacted. They are dependent upon the Chaco forest to survive and particularly vulnerable, given that when contact happens, it is almost always violent.¹¹

The Gran Chaco is highly biodiverse and home to many endemic species. It was once the impenetrable stronghold of almost magical creatures like the screaming hairy armadillo (a real animal), the famous jaguar, and the giant anteater.

But American soy companies like Cargill and Bunge have infiltrated these frontiers, bulldozing and burning these habitats to make way for vast fields of genetically

modified soy. However, the Chaco’s harsh climate isn’t naturally suited for vast monocultures. As a result, soy grown here is genetically modified and requires vast amounts of chemical fertilizers and toxic pesticides like the herbicide glyphosate. These too are transforming the Chaco. Waterways have become polluted, and local community members report a surge in birth defects, cancers, and respiratory illnesses. Even their pets and livestock are feeling the impacts - many families have reported that their animals have died due to this herbicide exposure.

Over the last two decades, the forests of the Chaco have experienced some of the world’s highest rates of conversion to agriculture, primarily for soybean farming and cattle ranching.¹² In fact, the Chaco forests are being lost at rates matching or exceeding those of rainforests¹³ – even the Amazon.¹⁴ More than eight million hectares of the Chaco have been cleared over just a dozen years.¹⁵ The total emissions associated with the conversion of Chaco forest and grasslands to croplands and pasture is estimated to be 3,024 million metric tons of carbon dioxide¹⁶ between 1985 and 2013, more than four times Germany’s carbon dioxide emissions from fuel combustion in 2015.¹⁷

This trend has been accelerating. Argentina alone lost 22 percent of its forests between 1990 and 2015,¹⁸ mostly to establish soy farms. Most of this deforestation is concentrated in the northern part of the Chaco in the



provinces of Santiago del Estero, Salta, Formosa and Chaco, which together account for 80% of the total deforestation.¹⁹ Argentina passed a forest protection law in 2009, which requires that at least 0.3 percent of the total national budget goes towards forest law enforcement.²⁰ However, the funds assigned by the Argentine Congress in 2016 for forest protection were 23 times less than what is required.²¹

Over the past several years, Paraguay has frequently been ranked as having one of the highest deforestation rates globally. In 2017, President Horacio Cartes issued a decree (criticized by many as illegal) that allowed landowners to clear all of the forest on their property, which accelerated the rate of deforestation in the Chaco.²²

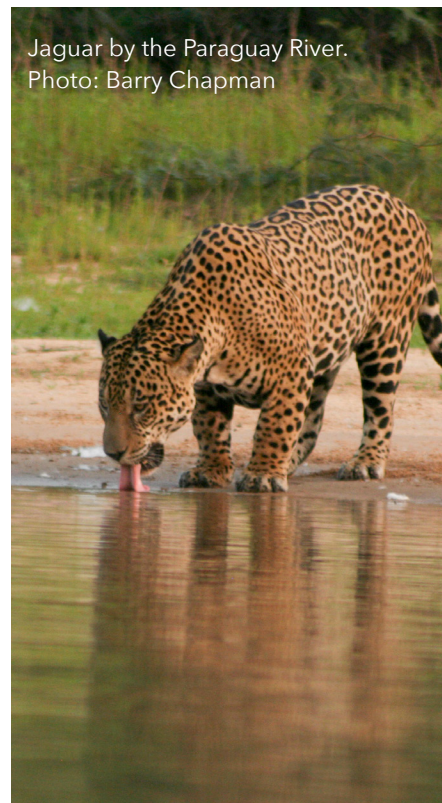
Poor governance coupled with large-scale expansion of soy is causing deforestation that, according to experts,

is threatening “the equilibrium between humans, animals and the environment.”²³ A recent study from Humbolt University estimates that more than half of all birds and 30 percent of all mammals found in the Chaco today will be extinct in 10-25 years if strong conservation measures are not implemented.²⁴

Other ecosystems have also felt the brunt of this unnecessary deforestation. Agricultural interests have cleared an estimated 98% of Paraguay’s Atlantic Forest.²⁵ The zero deforestation law of 2004²⁶ prohibits deforestation in the eastern parts of Paraguay until 2018, as well as the conversion of forests into agricultural or livestock production. Without sanctions or consequences for this illegal clearance, the deforesters face few obstacles in converting valuable forests to soy fields.



Ramon Lopez, Y'apo community leader, Paraguay.
Photo: Jim Wickens, Ecostorm

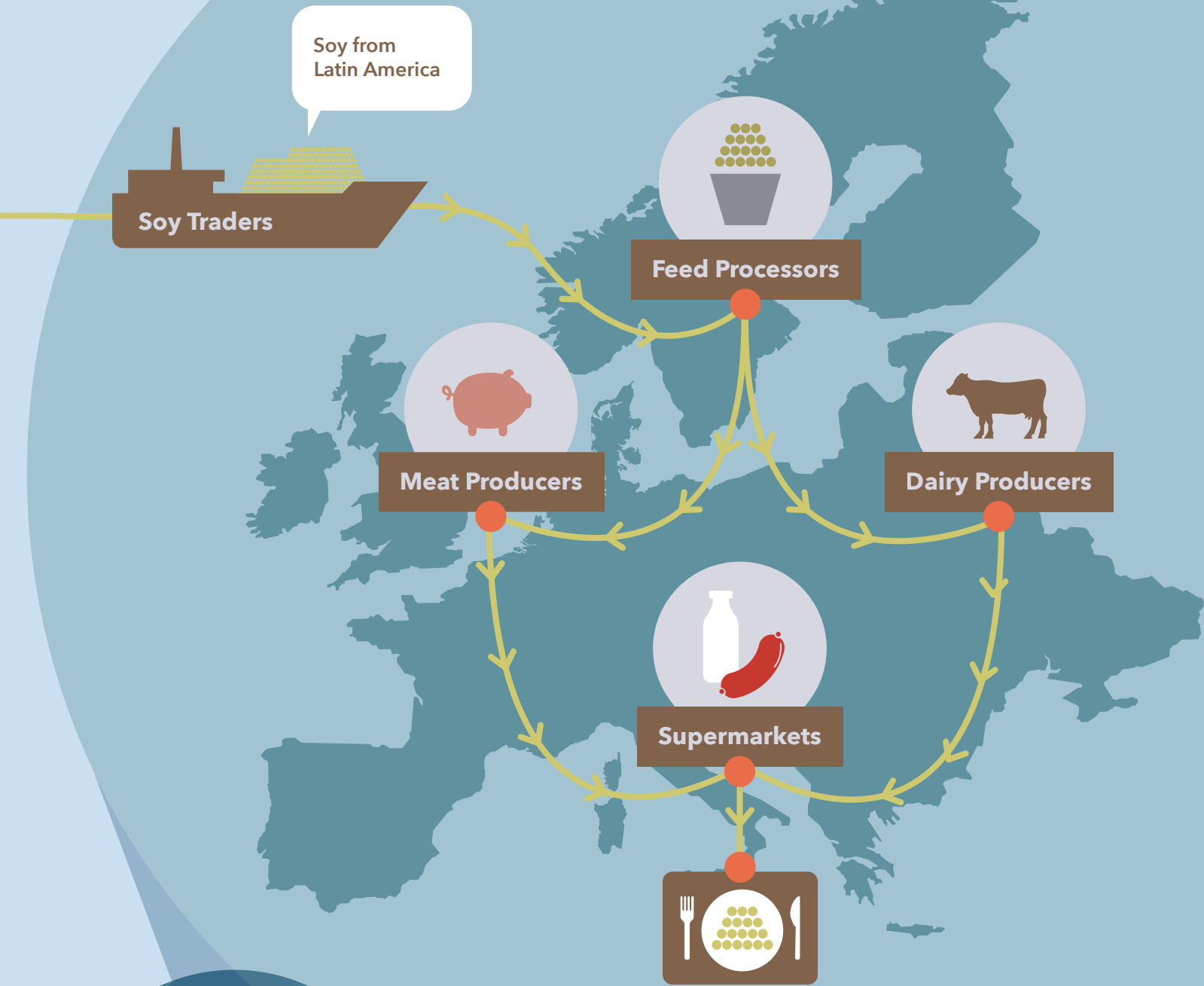


Jaguar by the Paraguay River.
Photo: Barry Chapman



The giant anteater is one of the 150 wildlife species endemic to the Chaco.
Photo: Dany13 - Flickr

Europe





The European Connection

The deforestation we document here is the result of a long supply chain that starts on the South American frontier and ends on European plates. We used satellite mapping to determine the current hotspots for deforestation for soy in the Chaco and sent our team to 20 sites to investigate.

At these sites, we found recent deforestation, including incidents of illegal deforestation. We spoke with employees on each of the farms (full case studies are available) and found that almost all of the deforestation soy is exported through the port of Rosario and adjacent ports. Due to the relative remoteness of the Chaco region, most of the soy is sold by the farmers to transport companies that bring the soy to these ports,²⁷ where the major agribusiness traders have their siloes and port facilities. However, transport in the area is about to improve. As part of its Plan Belgrano infrastructure initiative, the Argentine government is rebuilding a major railway line in the provinces of Salta and Jujuy to speed the transport of soy from the forest frontier in the Chaco to the ports.^{28 29}

This new infrastructure acts as a massive effective subsidy for the soy industry in the Chaco. As such, unless immediate conservation measures are put in place by the private sector and government, this railway is likely to significantly accelerate deforestation.

The growers told us that their soy is sold to the major traders, and cited Cargill and Bunge as major customers. Most of the landowners were not present at the sites we visited, and we learned that most of these farms are owned by corporations based in Buenos Aires or large foreign businesses. Interestingly, most of the Argentinian soy imported to Europe comes from these ports³⁰, which have the highest deforestation risk - as they are shipping soy grown on the Chaco's frontier.

Europe imported 27.8 million tons of soy from Latin America in 2016. The Netherlands, Spain, Germany, and Italy are the largest importers of South American soy in Europe.³¹ Once in Europe, the soy is purchased either by animal feed or meat processors and then is used to raise livestock. From there, it is sold to supermarkets and restaurants and then is purchased by consumers.





The Hidden Middlemen of European Meat

There is a small group of companies that sit astride the global agricultural trade - ADM, Bunge, Cargill, Louis Dreyfus, and Wilmar. These companies collectively control the majority of global grain trade³² according to some estimates up to 90%.³³ In addition to their role in trade, these companies also play a more direct role in driving ecosystem conversion by providing plantation owners with financing, fertilizer, infrastructure, and other incentives for new deforestation to expand their supply base. Given their outsized role, these companies have the power to insist that suppliers protect native ecosystems and land rights. But so far, these companies have prioritized reckless expansion over even easy conservation wins.

In the areas we visited for this investigation, we found significant connections to two major traders - Cargill and Bunge. In several places where deforestation was occurring, the farmers we interviewed said they sold to these two traders. Bunge operates a large silo in Argentina's Chaco Province,³⁴ and Cargill has two siloes nearby. In Paraguay's Atlantic Forest region, Cargill and Bunge operate siloes in San Pedro and Canindeyu Departments.

In response to our inquiries, Bunge said they have no record of buying from the growers highlighted in our investigation. Cargill reported that its siloes were unlikely to source from the sites we visited, because their processing facilities are not in close proximity to those sites. However, most of the soy from this area is transported to the ports of Rosario, as there is not much storage infrastructure installed in the frontier region. When asked about their level of traceability, both Cargill and Bunge have failed to provide responses indicating that they have complete information about the location and origin of the soy in their supply chain.

There is no legal requirement that the companies document the geographic origin of the soy or provide evidence that it has been produced legally. As such, it is currently impossible for European companies that source from these traders to ensure that the soy they are buying has not been produced through deforestation. It is worth noting that both Cargill and Bunge have made public commitments to zero-deforestation in their supply chains.³⁵ Knowing where and how their products have been produced is the first step in ensuring compliance with this commitment.



Aerial burn site in Paraguay
Photo: Jim Wickens, Ecostorm

These problems extend beyond the Gran Chaco; we previously documented 567,562 hectares of deforestation connected to Bunge and 130,000 hectares to Cargill in the Brazilian Cerrado; and additional extensive deforestation connected to Cargill in the Bolivian Amazon.³⁶ Among the large traders, Cargill and Bunge have been primary forces behind deforestation for soy across Latin America. These traders are among the largest exporters of soy from South America to Europe.

ADM operates in regions that are less exposed to deforestation, but has recently backtracked on its previous support for industry-wide conservation measures. ADM has told our team that they have resisted action because they “don’t want to break

ranks” with their competitors – prioritizing industry solidarity over both the environment and fair marketplace competition. Louis Dreyfus, while smaller, has been much more supportive of conservation.

One of the reasons why these companies’ policies and actions are so important is that they are operating in a frequently lawless environment. In Argentina, Greenpeace and others have revealed that licenses issued by the Salta provincial government have authorized the deforestation of almost 150,000 hectares of protected forest, in violation of national law.³⁷ In many cases, soy agribusinesses have illegally cleared land with impunity. However, they would not have an incentive to do so if European companies were unwilling to buy deforestation-based soy in the first place.

Existing Commitments

Companies at each stage of the supply chain have zero deforestation policies. However, despite the “green” reputation and PR that comes with announcing a zero deforestation policy, some companies have gone further than others to actually implement action plans and ensure change throughout their supply chains. To be clear, it’s a positive step that these companies have publicly expressed their desire to end deforestation. But in order to actually have any impact, these policies have to be implemented on the ground, not just put on paper.

Despite Cargill and Bunge publicly declaring their commitment to eliminating deforestation from their operations, for instance, deforestation has continued to occur in their supply chain. These companies have found ready customers among European supermarkets and fast food restaurants. Without a system in place to ensure full traceability and transparency, these companies can get away with publicly committing to zero deforestation, while being blind to the true impact of their operations.

The Human Impact

Our investigation found that the destruction driven by the soy industry is not limited to the environment, but has enormous human impacts as well. Most soy farms in the deforested areas make heavy use of the herbicide glyphosate (marketed by Monsanto as Roundup). The World Bank reports that the use of agro-chemicals in Argentina has increased by 1000% over the last 20 years, due to the shift to genetically modified soy that is resistant to glyphosate,

allowing even larger quantities to be sprayed.³⁸ The World Health Organization has declared glyphosate as a probable carcinogen, although Monsanto has defended the safety of its product.³⁹ After rounds of debate, the EU decided to renew the license for glyphosate for another five years. However, following its own independent studies, the Government of France has recently declared its intention to ban glyphosate as soon as alternatives are found, and at the latest



within three years.⁴⁰ On average, 19 percent of deaths in Argentina are caused by cancer; however, in the soy growing areas, more than 30 percent of deaths are caused by cancer, leading to concerns about how widespread pesticide and chemical use in the Chaco and elsewhere are affecting people’s health.⁴¹

A family of campesinos our researchers interviewed offered disturbing testimony to the real-world impact of herbicide use for soy. Living in a rural area about 100 kilometers from Resistencia, the capital of the Chaco Province, this family’s neighbor was using glyphosate to “clear” native vegetation from an entire field. However, while applying the herbicide, rain fell, and the runoff contaminated their land and the water hole for their animals. They reported that 140 chickens, goats and cows died, putting the family’s livelihood at risk.

were told that if they said anything, the local council would shut down their small business – their sole source of income after their animals died. “[The local council] representative said that possibly, if we keep insisting it’s a poison and they say it’s not, they come and close my workshop,” the family member explained. “It’s not only a workshop, a sawmill, it’s an industry, a factory... They would close the business.” Because of their fear of retaliation, all the victims’ families asked for anonymity.

In Avia Terai, home to Bunge’s largest silo in the region, the investigators interviewed Silvia Achaval. She is the mother of Camila, a six year-old girl who is fortunate to be alive. The family’s house is located very close to where an aerial spraying company fumigates soy fields. The planes “were flying when I was pregnant,” Silvia told us. Camila was born with serious birth defects. She was

rushed to the hospital. “She had everything out of place,” Silvia said. “They had to move her heart, her lungs... They told me that she had a complicated surgery ... that because of the poison, she was born this way. The doctors said she wasn’t going to survive. But thank God, she did.”

Camila’s doctor suspected her health problems were caused by pesticide contamination – especially glyphosate, which is in some studies found to be closely linked to fetal malformation,⁴² and was used in the aerial spraying. There are also suspicions of a second source of contamination: a seed plant called Agros Soluciones that is owned by Monsanto. Local residents report that the company leaves toxic waste that contaminates the air outside

of its facility. And Camila is not alone. “There are more and more children with many problems,” Silvia said. “Kids without hands or legs, they don’t speak. This soy contains a lot of poison. We have to stop it.” Camila and her neighbors have been working to do just that. After protests, the spraying company stopped flying airplanes over their village. But many residents are fearful of speaking out because of the power of the soy industry.

“[Politicians and corporations] care only about the money,” Silvia said. “They don’t care if people get sick, if children are born healthy. It’s all about the money, sadly. And the presidents and mayors need to stand up and say enough. No more poisoning.”

“[POLITICIANS AND CORPORATIONS] CARE ONLY ABOUT THE MONEY,” SILVIA SAID. “THEY DON’T CARE IF PEOPLE GET SICK, IF CHILDREN ARE BORN HEALTHY. IT’S ALL ABOUT THE MONEY, SADLY. AND THE PRESIDENTS AND MAYORS NEED TO STAND UP AND SAY ENOUGH. NO MORE POISONING.”

“The dead animals weren’t the worst,” a family member told us. “We suffered more. Most of the kids got sick. Everyone. I have a son, he’s 19... a 15-year-old, a 3-year-old girl and a 1-year-old boy. The youngest suffered the most.” They experienced “skin rashes, stomach problems and anemia,” he said. “It resulted in the hospitalization of our children.” He knew of two other nearby families that suffered similar problems, including one that lost more than 30 dogs and another that lost all of its animals and had a daughter born with disabilities.

Adding insult to injury, none of the families affected felt they could speak out at the time because they would suffer retaliation. The family we interviewed said that they



Human rights violations and violence against indigenous communities

The Y'apó indigenous community lives close to the Brazilian border in the city of Corpus Christi, Paraguay. According to testimony and photos from an investigation by the Paraguayan newspaper *E'a*, the community in 2014 was invaded by 50 armed security guards hired from a neighboring farm owned by the group "La Americana." This farm deforested 1,000 hectares of the indigenous land – and ever

since, the company has been accusing the Y'apó of trespassing on their own land.

According to the newspaper's investigation, which was corroborated by community testimony collected by our field team, the armed security guards smashed down doors and invaded houses, assaulted the adults and children, and kicked pregnant women – some of whom lost their babies. Thirty-two members of the community were hurt. Three guards and seven indigenous people were hit by gunshots. One guard was killed. Victims reported that the attack was intended to force the residents to leave the area.

Our investigators interviewed the community's leader, Abelino Garcia.⁴³ He told us that the farm keeps accusing them of trespassing and that his people live in constant fear that the private security officers will come back to try to force them to leave – or worse. He also said their rivers are so polluted by pesticides that fish – an important food source – are dying off. And with the community now surrounded by soy fields, opportunities for traditional hunting have nearly disappeared. The arrival of soy has also sown conflict in the community between those who are trying to protect their traditional lands and those who have sold them to soy companies. The arrival of large-scale soy has put the local culture at risk.

Ramón Lopez,⁴⁴ leader of the indigenous communities throughout the region, told us that many other communities were displaced after deforestation destroyed their traditional way of living. Some were even left without wood to build houses. Most distressingly, he said there is not much hope for the indigenous communities to survive for much longer.



Y'apó community children, Paraguay
Photo: Jim Wickens, Ecostorm

Candida Benitez, an indigenous woman who lives at a landfill site in Paraguay.
Photo: Jim Wickens, Ecostorm



Living on Landfill Sites

Our investigators interviewed Candida Ferreira Benitez, an indigenous woman who lives at a landfill site in the city of Nueva Esperanza, in Paraguay's Canindeyu Department.

She had previously lived with her tribe, the Arroyo Guazu, in Alto Parana Department. But she told us that after the forest was cut down to make space for soy farms, there were no longer any animals to hunt, fruit to gather, or wood to build houses. As a result, the only way to make a living was for indigenous people to rent their land to soy farmers. But Candida, a single

mother, received no money for the rentals and had no way to earn a living. This is in conflict with Paraguayan law,⁴⁵ which forbids lease of any territories classified as indigenous peoples' lands to third parties.⁴⁶

Candida was forced to leave her community, and found a job on the landfill site. Soon afterwards, ten more families from her community joined her. All live in unhealthy and impoverished circumstances. Candida misses her home and wishes she could return, but because of soy farming, there is no forest left.

A Proven Alternative

The tragedy of this deforestation and human rights abuse is that it is entirely avoidable. The same big soy companies that are driving deforestation on the frontier have shown elsewhere in Latin America how to expand agriculture without destruction of native ecosystems.

More than a decade ago, facing pressure from customers in Europe and other parts of the world, Cargill, Bunge, ADM, Louis Dreyfus and others agreed to ban purchases from any farmers engaged in deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon. Within three years, deforestation for soy plummeted from 30% of the total to just one percent.⁴⁷ Despite the ban on deforestation, these companies have been able to expand the area planted with soy in the Brazilian Amazon more than two million hectares by focusing

on degraded land, a huge environmental and economic win-win. Along with similar progress in the cattle sector, this drop in deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon is considered one of the world's greatest environmental success stories.

Despite this success, two of the largest soy companies in the world – Bunge and Cargill – have continued to press expansion into new, untouched frontiers outside the Brazilian Amazon, including the Gran Chaco of Argentina and Paraguay, as well as the Brazilian Cerrado, and the Bolivian Amazon. Although competitors like Louis Dreyfus Company and Wilmar International have expressed willingness to extend the Brazilian success across South America, Cargill and Bunge have bitterly resisted efforts to expand deforestation-free production.



Movement in the Industry

To their credit, some of the industry's largest players have at least started to call for action. 61 of the world's leading meat and dairy sellers, including Metro AG, Tesco, Marks and Spencer, Carrefour, Wal-Mart, McDonald's, and Unilever have recently issued a call to end all destruction of native vegetation in Brazil's Cerrado.⁴⁸ While this "Cerrado Manifesto" is an encouraging first step, it also risks replicating the great gap of the original Brazilian Soy Moratorium. By confining action to just one ecosystem, it provides a perverse incentive for companies like Bunge and Cargill to shift their deforestation to other

frontiers like Argentina and Paraguay. Bunge and Cargill operate across South America; to be effective, conservation measures must operate on the same scale as these giant corporations.

Moreover, just politely calling for action is not sufficient. Until Bunge and Cargill are threatened with customers actually shifting their purchase volumes to responsible providers of soy, they may believe they can ride out the criticism. Indeed, threats to discontinue business were what drove Bunge and Cargill to adopt the successful Brazilian Soy Moratorium in the first place.

The Brazilian Cerrado
Foto: Alex Costa



Fresh clearance and logs in Paraguay.
Photo: Jim Wickens, Ecostorm



Moving From “In Principle” to In Action

European companies have tremendous leverage: they imported 27.8 million tons of soy from Latin America in 2016.⁴⁹ In addition, Europe is an attractive market: it is considered stable and high value, not subject to the kind of arbitrary market interference that sometimes squeezes the traders’ profits in Asia. Companies like Louis Dreyfus and Wilmar International are making inroads against deforestation by being supportive of industry-wide action. But even these companies have room for improvement. By shifting their soy suppliers to companies that support comprehensive action to stop deforestation, European meat buyers will provide a clear market incentive for more sustainable practices.

In addition, these companies need to commit to global social and human rights standards of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), in order to ensure their operations are not infringing on the land of indigenous or other local communities and that social conflict is not part of the soy production process. Based on research from the scientific community and the ongoing debate,⁵⁰ the use of glyphosate as an herbicide should be re-examined, and steps should be taken to minimize the exposure to local communities.

In other European countries, there have been some recent positive developments to put an end to “imported” deforestation. Within its 2017 Climate Action Plan, France is developing a national strategy to ensure that its imported commodities, such as palm oil and soy, do not cause deforestation. In addition, the country has transposed European regulations to hold companies accountable for environmental and social harm in their supply chains. Its recent “devoir de vigilance” law of February 2017 requires large

companies with over 10,000 employees to establish a risk assessment, as well as report and act on environmental and social damage within their supply chains, including subcontractors and suppliers all over the world. As such, it provides a way to let French companies and consumers alike finally know more about where their food comes from and the manner in which it was produced.

The European Union as a whole is in a position to enact great change throughout the industry. As 97% of the soy used for animal feed in the EU is imported, it has a significant responsibility to demand that this soy is not contributing to the destruction of forests and native ecosystems. The EU must send a strong signal to the market by requiring that companies implement measures for transparency and traceability into their supply chains to ensure that agricultural commodities are free from deforestation, human rights abuses and land grabs.⁵¹ In addition, the EU must seize the opportunity of ongoing agricultural policy reform to ensure that it diversifies its protein production to include meat alternatives and supports the transition towards agroecological production practices, which benefit farmers and improve soils.⁵²

To be clear, just stopping deforestation, land grabbing and the most egregious uses of pesticides doesn’t solve all of meat’s environmental challenges. But stopping deforestation and land-grabbing should be the low-hanging fruit of corporate responsibility. It is easy and affordable, and has already been proven achievable in other parts of South America on a vast scale. There should be no excuse for European companies to not take immediate action; this represents an opportunity for a major win.



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