

Friends of the Earth International statement – 22 April 2008

The only responsible soy is less soy

The Roundtable on Responsible Soy frustrates real solutions

Friends of the Earth International¹ strongly rejects the current process of the Roundtable on Responsible Soy (RTRS). The Roundtable completely fails to address the major social and environmental impacts of industrial-scale soy cultivation and frustrates real solutions. Certification provides a façade of sustainability for multinationals and agribusinesses which control the production, finance, trade, processing and marketing of soy products as well as for major oil and agrofuel companies such as Shell and British Petroleum.

Impacts of soy monocultures

The most serious problems caused by soy monocultures are linked to their continued expansion:

- Conversion of forests and savannahs and related loss of biodiversity, climate change through land-use changes, fertiliser use and NO_x emissions, disruption of surface and ground water and rainfall patterns.
- Social problems such as land conflicts and human rights violations, loss of livelihoods, poisoning and expulsion of rural communities, small farmers and indigenous peoples.
- Forced displacement of the local population into cities and undisturbed natural areas, increasing concentration of land, and related rural unemployment, poverty and malnutrition.
- Displacement of existing agriculture (particularly cattle ranching and small holder agriculture) to unexploited and vulnerable primary forests and savannahs.
- Rising food prices and loss of food security and sovereignty due to displacement of staple food crops and increasing corporate control over food production.

Expansion of soy monocultures to supply the growing markets for cheap animal feed and agrofuels intensifies the already well-documented problems caused by existing plantations; pollution and severe health problems in the local population due to the massive use of agrochemicals, soil erosion, low employment and slavery like conditions on industrial farms. Thousands of small farmers, who cannot compete with large producers in an increasingly globalised market, have been driven out of employment.

Promotion of GM soy as 'responsible'

The RTRS will promote genetically modified (GM) soy as "responsible soy", even though there is increasing evidence, including governmental data from the major producer countries, that after a few years of GM soy cultivation, pesticide use increases substantially. For example, an almost 80 per cent increase in the use of the herbicide RoundUp (glyphosate) has been recorded in Brazil between 2000 and 2005 and a 15-fold increase in the United States between 1994 and 2005. This has led to increasing cases of herbicide-resistant weeds in Brazil, Argentina and United States, pushing farmers onto a new pesticide treadmill, increasing production costs and environmental degradation. Furthermore, because of the sheer size of territory currently used for soy production, even the use of legally permitted agrochemicals leads to massive pollution of the countryside in the producing countries, causing depletion of freshwater resources of Indigenous Peoples and rural communities, biodiversity loss, and numerous health problems amongst the rural population, often with fatal consequences.

GM crops are also rejected by millions of consumers, NGOs and many Governments all over the world because of mounting scientific controversy as to their environmental and health impacts, and because of the increased control of agrochemical multinational companies on farmers through patented GM seed and restrictive user contracts that stop farmers re-using

¹ Friends of the Earth International is the world's largest grassroots environmental network, uniting 70 national member groups and some 5,000 local activist groups on every continent. The network represents over 2 million members and supporters around the world.

seed as has been the tradition for thousands of years.

Impacts of factory farming dependant on imported soy

The majority of soy produced in Latin America is exported to Europe and China where it is used as animal feed in intensive livestock production. This sector is increasingly criticised for its poor animal welfare, environmental pollution and recurring livestock diseases. The large-scale use of imported soy allows increasing intensification of livestock production and causes serious environmental pollution. For example while many parts of Europe are polluted by an extreme excess of nutrients, South America uses million of tons of chemical fertilizer to make up for nutrient losses.

Increasing demand

It is expected that the demand for soybean will soar in the coming decades. This has two main causes: the increasing use of soy animal feeds to meet the rapidly growing global demand for meat, eggs and dairy: The FAO expects the demand for meat and dairy products to double between now and 2050. Secondly, the ill-considered goals of the EU, the USA, Brazil and other countries for the large scale deployment of agricultural crops for transport fuel and power generation.

RTRS is a false solution

The main social and environmental impacts of soy expansion are indirect and take place outside the actual farms, on a regional, national and even global scale. Examples include the displacement of other agricultural activities into pristine natural areas, environmental impacts of infrastructural projects needed to export the soy, global warming, rising food prices, rural migration to urban areas, and decreased food security. These impacts cannot be controlled without drastically reducing the demand for soy. The RTRS has virtually ignored these social and environmental impacts and it is highly unlikely that these will ever be solved by simple certification schemes.

RTRS means greenwash for companies

The companies involved in the RTRS have unparalleled control over the trade in soy. Large international agribusinesses such as Cargill, Bunge and Archer Daniels Midland not only dominate the soy market in producing countries but also control 80% of the European soybean crushing industry, one of the largest export markets for South American soy. Financial institutions involved include the largest multilateral lender, the IFC and two of the biggest foreign banks in Latin America, ABN Amro and Rabobank. The feed companies involved control about 40% of the European market for soy meal. They are now joined by global energy giants and the fast growing agrofuel companies in Europe. Together these companies are in a unique position to control the massive expansion of soy by controlling both demand and supply of cheap soy for feed and fuel. However, none of these companies have an interest in reducing the production or consumption of soy.

Their involvement in the RTRS shows an attempt to certify their activities while continuing with devastating expansion plans that cripple any attempts to address the biggest impacts. Large corporations that make millions in profits from soy expansion cannot be relied on to make the drastic changes necessary to prevent the worst impacts of expanding soy frontiers.

RTRS frustrates real solutions

By providing a veneer of sustainability to an inherently unsustainable system of production, the RTRS is a dangerous hindrance to the development of real solutions. For these reasons Friends of the Earth International rejects the Round table on Sustainable Soy and calls on Governments, civil society and companies to promote real solutions such as:

- executing structural land reforms in producing countries which will address highly unequal land ownership and concentration;
- stimulating the reduction of meat, eggs and dairy consumption in importing countries;
- substituting soy in animal feed with locally grown protein crops in importing countries;
- stopping the promotion of large scale agrofuel production as a sustainable solution;
- developing better transport systems that reduce demand for energy and fuel;
- promoting agricultural practices which work with nature instead of against it, like organic agriculture and integrated crop management.

- Increased Government support for practises such as diversification of production and stimulation of local production for local markets that contribute to food security and food sovereignty in producer and consumer countries