

# Media Briefing



**November 2008**

**European Coordination  
Via Campesina**

## **The Great European Land Grab**

### **The costs of Europe's appetite for animal feeds and agrofuels**

#### **Summary**

The European Union (EU) uses over 16 million hectares of farmland every year to feed its livestock and fuel its cars. This is equal to the total combined arable farmland of Germany and Hungary.

The single largest use of land is for soy which is imported to Europe primarily as animal feed but increasingly used to produce agrofuels (also called biofuels). Most of this land is in South America where increasing demand is driving the loss of primary forests, significant climate changing emissions, food insecurity and rural conflict. The amount of land the EU now needs for agrofuels and animal feeds exceeds the total area deforested globally every year.<sup>1</sup>

This research looks at the European 'footprint' for feeds and fuels<sup>2</sup>. The main crop used for biodiesel in Europe is oilseed rape (56%) which uses over two million hectares of agricultural land. Soy oil makes up an estimated 17% of the EU's biodiesel and palm oil, which is blamed for large-scale deforestation and large climate emissions in Asia accounts for 7% of biodiesel. Germany is the world's biggest consumer of biodiesel – using nearly 3,800 million litres of biodiesel in 2007 - almost the equivalent of the rest of the EU put together.

People living in Cyprus, Spain and Denmark eat the largest amount of animal products in the EU, permanently using 340, 253 and 243 m<sup>2</sup> abroad per person respectively, just for the production of the soy which is fed to their farm animals. Germany, France and the UK together need 4.5 million hectares to grow soy to maintain their current diets.

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.

Friends of the Earth (FoE) and the European Coordination Via Campesina believe that if the EU 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 halt the use of crops to produce agrofuels.

---

<sup>1</sup> The FAO estimates 13 million hectares of forests are lost every year - Deforestation accounts for some 20% of global carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions (IPCC, 2007) – more than total EU greenhouse gas emissions. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0645:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>2</sup> The research was commissioned by Friends of the Earth and the European coordination of the farmers' organisation Via Campesina (24 farmer and rural organisations from 14 European countries) as part of the EU-funded project "Feeding and Fuelling Europe".

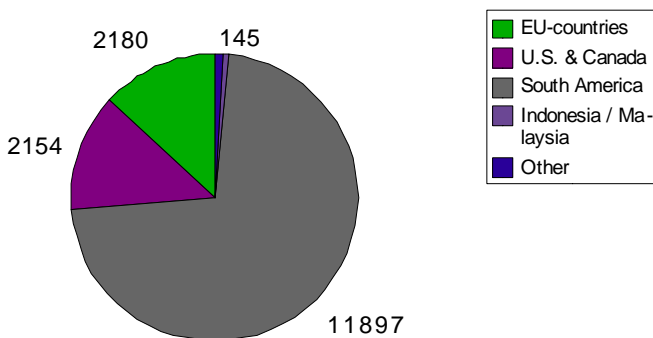
## Introduction

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.

This research investigated the land 'footprint' of the EU's consumption of animal products and the main agrofuels by measuring the amount of land for soy, palm oil and sugarcane needed to produce them. It found that soy production for the EU uses 14 million hectares of land, 87% of which is in Brazil and Argentina.

Country of origin	Total acreage feed and fuel (hectares)				
	Soybeans	Rapeseed	Oil Palm	Sugar cane	
EU-countries		2,180,203			2,180,203
United States	1,862,353				1,862,353
Canada	291,924				291,924
Argentina	4,423,376				4,423,376
Brazil	6,883,057			125,138	7,008,195
Paraguay	423,405				423,405
Uruguay	41,849				41,849
Indonesia/Malaysia			114,661		114,661
Other	145,132				145,132
<b>Total acreage</b>	<b>14,071,096</b>	<b>2,180,203</b>	<b>114,661</b>	<b>125,138</b>	<b>16,491,098</b>

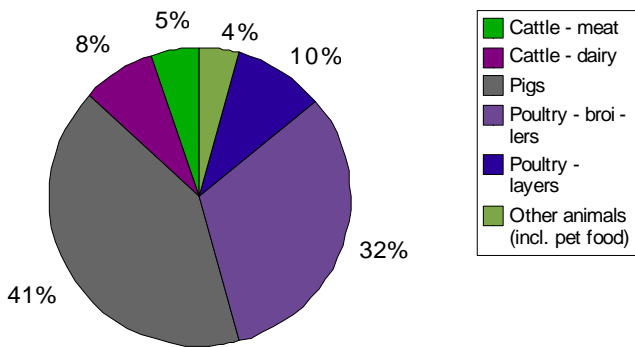
**Hectares used for EU consumption of animal products & agrofuels (x 1000)**



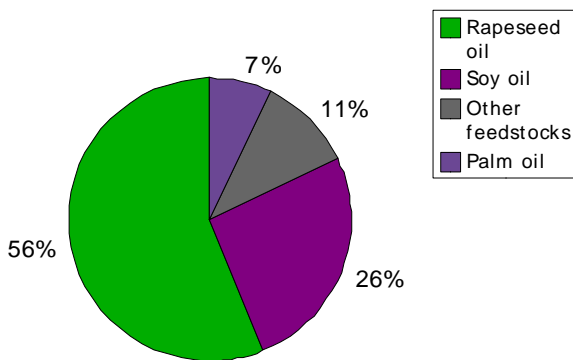
The largest user of soy in the EU is intensive pork farming followed by poultry.

Germany, France and the United Kingdom use the most land for soy production while, per capita, soy is highest in Cyprus, Spain and Denmark where the highest amounts of animal products are consumed.

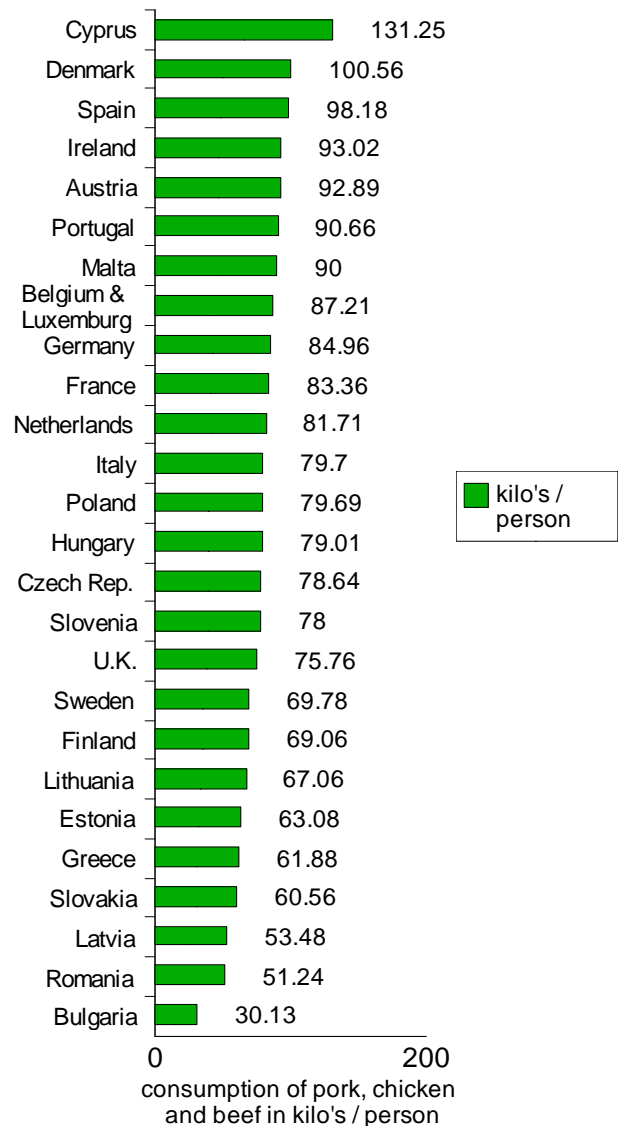
### Consumption of soy meal by livestock sector



### Feedstocks used for EU biodiesel consumption



### Meat consumption per capita



### Soy and deforestation

Soy production in South America has more than doubled in the last 15 years. Brazil is the world's 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 been lost already. 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 18% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions – more than the total of GHG emissions in the EU. 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 and agrofuels.

### **Soy and food insecurity**

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, such as 130% for rice and 272% for lentils.

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

Globally, growing feeds for animals uses a third of 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.

### **Genetically modified soy**

The majority of soy in Latin America is grown from Monsanto's genetically modified (GM) seed known as Roundup Ready, prompting growers to use even more intensive farming methods. Roundup Ready soy is genetically modified to tolerate Monsanto's Roundup (glyphosate) herbicide, but government data now confirms that reliance on this technology 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.

This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Commission. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the authors and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Commission.

