

60 views | Jul 17, 2020, 07:10am EDT

Rotten Apples Could Spoil Brazilian Soybean Exports



Jordan Strickler Contributor 

Food & Drink

I cover every spectrum of agriculture, from large operations to small.



Soybean field besides the original forest of the Amazon GETTY

It only takes a couple of bad apples to spoil a good thing.

According to a [new study](#) published in the journal Science titled "The rotten apples of Brazil's agribusiness," over a fifth of Brazil's annual soybean exports to the European Union are potentially contaminated with crops grown on land from illegal deforestation. However, it is only 2% of the farms which are causing 62% of the deforestation which threatens an international trading agreement.

Clear-cutting forests on private land for the growing of soybeans violates Brazil's own [Forest Code law](#) and the [soy moratorium agreement](#), which bans the clearing of forests for soy production. The illegal cutting has not only angered environmentalists, but is also threatening the \$19 trillion trade deal between the European Union and Mercosur (a bloc of South American countries which include Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay) if Brazil didn't do more to protect the Amazon.

"Until now, agribusiness and the Brazilian government have claimed that they cannot monitor the entire supply chain, nor distinguish the legal from the illegal deforestation," said Raoni Rajão, a professor at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and the lead author of the study.

Most Popular In: [Food & Drink](#) ^

[As Other Restaurants Close, Bonchon, Known For Korean Fried Chicken, Is Growing](#)

[Call It 'Cell-Based': New Study Looks At Selling Seafood Grown From Cells](#)

[Vino Nobile Di Montepulciano - The Road Ahead](#)

Rajao said his team's attention focused on the EU in part due to the Mercosur deal, which, if ratified, would bump up two-way farm trade between the nations. Signed last June, the agreement is the largest trade treaty ever negotiated, however, it is in danger of falling through if precautions are not taken to cut back on Brazil's lax deforestation policies.

One of the most vocal was French president Emmanuel Macron who suspended negotiations on the deal stating that "(We will not make) any trade agreement with countries that do not respect the Paris (Climate) Agreement." France is one of the [biggest international trading partners](#) with Brazil.

International buyers of Brazil's agricultural commodities have long expressed concern that products contaminated with deforestation could be reaching their countries. EU leaders also have [openly criticized the Brazilian government](#), bolstering demands for the boycott of Brazilian

products in response to the forest fires that ripped through the country in August 2019.

Massive deforestation is an issue which many put on the shoulders of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who has led a widespread dismantling of environmental laws since taking office in January of 2019. In the past few months, trade groups, financial institutions and major corporations from around the globe have urged President Bolsonaro to take rethink his actions and stop the clearing. A [letter signed by 29 financial institutions](#) said Brazil's "dismantling" of environmental policies are "creating widespread uncertainty about the conditions for investing."

The outcry is mostly responsible for President Bolsonaro putting a 120-day ban on agricultural and forest fires as the region enters its dry season on Thursday.

Thus far in 2020, Brazil's deforestation [skyrocketed by 25%](#), for a total of 1,184 square miles. [In June alone](#), Brazil's deforestation rose 10.7% compared to June of 2019. If the trend of the year's 25% loss continues, it would mark a record with an estimated loss of 5,701 square miles of forest lost. That land mass exceeds the size of Connecticut.

"Pummeled by the impacts of political signals encouraging the clearing of forests, mostly for land grabbing, Brazil's forests are at a breaking point," said Professor Britaldo Soares-Filho, a UFMG co-author of the study. "It's critical for Europe to use its trade might and purchasing power to help roll back this tragic dismantling of Brazil's environmental protection, which has implications for the global climate, local people and the country's valued ecosystem services. With this research, policymakers in Brussels finally have the information they need to assess the extent of the problem in the Brazilian soy and beef sectors. It's time for them to act."

The 12 researchers from Brazil, Germany and the U.S. who penned the study developed high-powered software to analyze 815,000 individual rural properties in order to assess where illegal deforestation associated with soy and beef production are taking place and how much of these

products is reaching the EU. The article also estimates the greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation that is linked with soy and beef exports, pointing out the shared responsibilities of international buyers.

The UFMG study concluded that producers on 45% of rural Amazon properties and 48% of rural Cerrado properties which supply soy and beef for exports are failing to comply with the limits on deforestation laid out in Brazil's Forest Code. Of 53,000 properties producing soy in both regions, 20% have grown soy on land deforested after 2008; the authors of the report estimate that half of this soy was produced on recently illegally deforested land.

Roughly 41%, or 13.6 million metric tons, of the EU's soy imports come from Brazil each year. Some 69% come from the Amazon and Cerrado regions. According to the study, about two million tons of soy grown on properties with illegal deforestation may have reached EU markets annually during the period of analysis, 500 thousand of which came from the Amazon region. In most cases, the recently cleared areas are not used to grow soy in order to comply with the rules of the moratoria. But this has not prevented soy farms from clearing their lands illegally for pasturelands and other crops.

[According to Yale](#), Brazil has 24-25 million hectares devoted to the growth of soybeans and is the second-largest producer of the crop. Together, the United States, Brazil and Argentina [produce approximately 80%](#) of the world's soy. Currently on par with the U.S., by 2029, Brazil is expected to become the world's largest soybean producer according to The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization.

"Right now, Brazil's enforcement of its own forest protection laws isn't strong enough to guarantee compliance with the European Union's strict environmental standards for trading partners," said Dr. Felipe Nunes from UFMG. "But if Brazil is serious about its trading ambitions, it can join forces with the EU to use its own available tools...to end illegal

deforestation linked to soy and beef supply chains. Brazil already has the means. All that's needed is the political will."

Follow me on [Twitter](#).



Jordan Strickler

I'm a freelance writer who has been involved in the agriculture industry my whole life. A University of Kentucky College of Agriculture graduate, I've spilled my share of... **Read More**

[Site Feedback](#)

[Tips](#)

[Corrections](#)

[Reprints & Permissions](#)

[Terms](#)

[Privacy](#)

© 2020 Forbes Media LLC. All Rights Reserved.

[AdChoices](#)
