

Study: Brazilian beef and soy exports to EU linked to deforestation

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Rio de Janeiro (dpa) – Around one-fifth of the annual exports of soy and beef from Brazil to the European Union are potentially linked to illegal deforestation in the Amazon rainforest and in the Cerrado savannah, according to a study published on Thursday.

The study "The rotten apples of Brazil's agribusiness," which was published in the journal *Science*, was carried out by 12 researchers from Brazil, Germany and the United States who analysed the use of over 800,000 rural properties.

The EU imports about 13.6 million metric tons of soy and 189,000 tons of beef from Brazil annually.

President Jair Bolsonaro's government has come under growing pressure from European and other investors over the destruction of the Amazon rainforest, which plays a key role in the fight against climate change.

According to the study, about 2 million tons of soy grown on properties with illegal deforestation may have reached EU markets annually, 500,000 of which came from the Amazon, between 2009 and 2017.

The authors also found that of a total of 4.1 million head of cattle traded to slaughterhouses, at least 500,000 are coming directly from properties that may have deforested illegally.

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The Brazilian government has encouraged the clear-cutting of forests on private properties and public lands and dismantled environmental protections.

"Pummelled 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 co-author of the study.

At a time when the EU is negotiating a trade deal with the South American bloc Mercosur, the authors called on it to use its trading might to prevent the weakening of Brazil's environmental protection.

As pressure mounted on the government, it announced on Thursday that it was banning slash-and-burn farming in the Amazon and Pantanal regions for 120 days.

The decree was published one day after Vice President Hamilton Mourao said the army would stay until 2022 to fight fires in the Amazon, which in June recorded the worst blazes for that month in 13 years.

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