



**Friends of  
the Earth  
Europe**

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## **Europe's hunger for land**

**Why the EU needs a Land as a Resource  
Communication in 2016**

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*The project was supported by:*



Federal Ministry for the  
Environment, Nature Conservation  
and Nuclear Safety



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We have a finite amount of land, yet demand for it is growing, and the global impacts of our land consumption are worsening. Despite its promises, the European Commission did not include the Land as a Resource Communication in its 2015 Work Programme, which would have started the process of addressing land overconsumption.

**Can the EU continue down the path of empty promises and inaction on land? Or will there be a positive end in sight next year with the launch of a Land Communication?**

### Europe's global land consumption

Around the world, land is subject to competing pressures: areas to live in, areas to grow food, areas to mine for materials, and areas to produce energy, to name but a few. Within Europe itself, 80% of available land is used for settlement, production systems and infrastructure<sup>1</sup>, and what is left is fast disappearing: an area of agricultural and natural land six times the size of Brussels is converted into artificial areas each year.

However, Europe also has one of the highest resource consumption rates in the world, leading to our demand for land – our land footprint – being much higher than what the continent can supply.

The EU's total land footprint is a staggering 640 million hectares a year; 1.5 times the size of the continent itself.

60% of the land embodied in our raw materials and products is imported, mainly from China, Brazil, and Russia<sup>3</sup>. As a whole, we are the continent most dependent on imported natural resources for our economic activities. Measuring and reducing our resource use is crucial to ensure we live within planetary boundaries in the face of growing future constraints.

### What is the land footprint?

The land footprint, or actual land demand, is a method for assessing the total land required to satisfy the final consumption of goods and services. It is a powerful method of illustrating the dependency of countries or world regions on foreign land, which is embodied in imports and exports.

The land footprint by itself provides useful information, but it is far more powerful when combined with other indicators such as the water, material and carbon footprints to identify true resource efficiency, as well as trade-offs and potential synergies across the various categories of natural resource use.

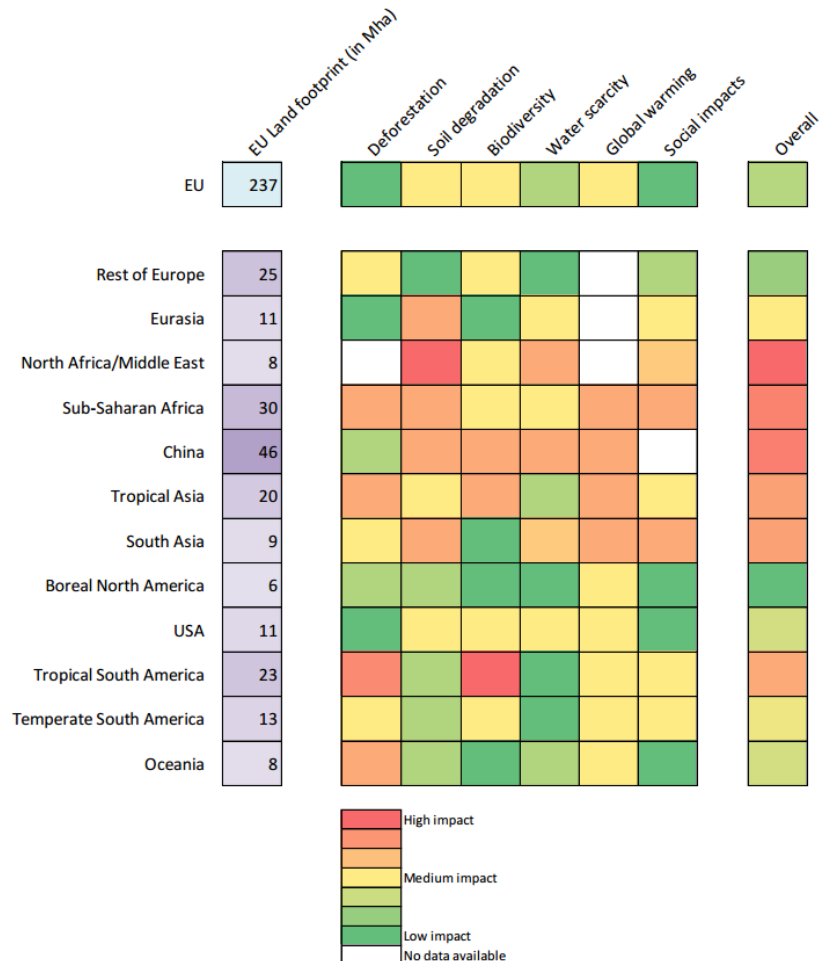
The land footprints of some popular products<sup>2</sup>:



## Impacts resulting from Europe's land footprint

On its own, the land footprint does not directly say anything about the value or quality of land being used, or directly reveal ecological or social impacts. However, it can indicate issues which may cause these problems. Research published by the European Commission<sup>4</sup>, shows some of the impacts felt in different countries and regions of the world, and their link with EU land footprint.

Two out of the three highest overall impacts are felt in China and Sub-Saharan Africa, regions where the EU has the highest land footprints. Specific hotspots can also be identified, for example, there is a high impact on soil degradation in North Africa and the Middle East, and on deforestation and biodiversity in tropical zones in South America (correspondingly, this is the region with the highest risk of plant and animal extinction in the world<sup>5</sup>). There is also a strong link between land consumption and water scarcity in places such as China, North Africa and the Middle East.



Impacts associated with EU land use change and/or management in different countries and regions of the world

## Stark realities on the ground

**Land grabbing in Indonesia:** Consumption of biofuels in Europe has increased massively in the past decade, largely due to EU biofuels targets within various policies since 2003<sup>6</sup>. Over half of Europe's imports of palm oil, a crop used to produce biofuels, come from Indonesia. The rapid increase in demand has led to the grabbing of local people's land to grow the crop. A large corporation linked to many of these land grabs is Wilmar International. They have been involved in such destructive actions as the clearing of primary forest belonging to indigenous communities in 24 villages of a northern Indonesian island, despite this being in violation of company commitments<sup>7</sup>.

**Deforestation in Brazil:** The EU is also one of the largest importers of products resulting from illegal deforestation. An equivalent of one football pitch of forest was illegally felled *every two minutes* from 2000 to 2012 in order to supply the EU with soy, beef, palm oil and leather<sup>8</sup>. More than half of the land illegally deforested for these imports is in Brazil. A shocking example of this was seen in the expansion of a cattle slaughterhouse owned by Brazilian company Bertin Ltda in 2007. The deforestation rate within the surrounding area is estimated to have increased by 40% since the loan to expand was agreed, despite loan conditions meant to minimise the impact of the new facility on surrounding forests<sup>9</sup>.

## Political promises

At a European level, there have been many assertions that we need action on land consumption:

- **2011: Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe** (part of the Europe 2020 strategy) – focused on how Europe can better use resources and transform to a fully sustainable economy, including developing “a 'dashboard' of indicators on water, land, materials and carbon and indicators that measure environmental impacts”<sup>10</sup>
- **2012: The European Resource Efficiency Platform’s Manifesto** urged the European Commission to set targets and measure progress on Europe’s land footprint, as well as the water, material and carbon footprints<sup>11</sup>
- **2014: The 7th Environment Action Programme** called for the adoption of indicators and reduction targets for a land footprint, in addition to water, material and carbon footprints and their role within the European Semester<sup>12</sup>
- **2014: The Circular Economy Package** stated that a process would be developed to agree land consumption indicators. A Land as a Resource Communication was therefore due to be published in 2015 to start that process. However, this initiative was absent from the 2015 Work Programme
- **2015: The European Parliament’s Own-initiative Report on Resource Efficiency** urged the European Commission to make the measurement of Europe’s land footprint legally binding by 2018, as well as water, material and carbon footprints, and to reduce the consumption of resources in absolute terms<sup>13</sup>

In addition, we have seen fragmented approaches by the EU which address land issues directly and indirectly, such as the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan and initiatives in cascading use of biomass. However, these approaches are largely disjointed and sectoral, and are incoherent with policies in other areas such as biofuels and trade liberalisation, which do much to counter any improvements. Starting the process to develop and publish a Land as a Resource Communication would begin to solve these issues.

## Why Land as a Resource?

Further concrete action beyond the previous acknowledgements of the importance of land consumption and its cross-cutting nature area is urgently needed in order to halt the overconsumption of land.

***The EU needs to table a Land as a Resource Communication in 2016 in order to bring a harmonised approach on land issues and map out concrete proposals and actions to reduce pressure on this valuable resource.***

In addition, Friends of the Earth Europe also urges the European Commission to adopt the following:

- Measure EU’s and Member States’ land footprints, in addition to water, material and carbon footprints, and set reduction targets
- Introduce policies to reduce EU land consumption, as well as water, material and carbon consumption
- Include the land, water, material and carbon footprints in the EU’s overarching policies, such as the Economic Semester and policy impact assessments (particularly relevant for policies on the bioeconomy, biomass burning and agrofuels)
- Support EU businesses and supply chains by providing them with a clear methodology and guidance for calculating the land, water, material and carbon footprints of their products



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