



MERCOSUR FILES



**How the toxic agribusiness
model promoted by the
EU-Mercosur deal will
undermine Brazil's climate
and deforestation goals**



**Friends of
the Earth
Europe**

Brazil has lost a decade in crucial climate action.

After years of Bolsonaro's government systematically undermining efforts to protect the climate and human rights, Brazil is left at an environmental tipping point. And even now Bolsonaro is gone, corporate agribusiness continues to drive deforestation to record levels.

In the first three months of this year, the destruction of the Cerrado was the highest recorded since 2018.¹ Meanwhile, the deforestation in the Amazon was the second highest since 2015.²

The new government has pledged that “zero deforestation” is a priority. But data shows that reversing a system of destruction and dismantling the exploitative agribusiness sector will be extremely difficult.

Human rights violations and peasant rights violations, toxic pesticide use, carbon emissions and land degradation are all driven by agribusiness corporations linked to European and global supply chains.

Despite this, the European Union is working to increase exports of tainted commodities through the EU-Mercosur free trade deal.

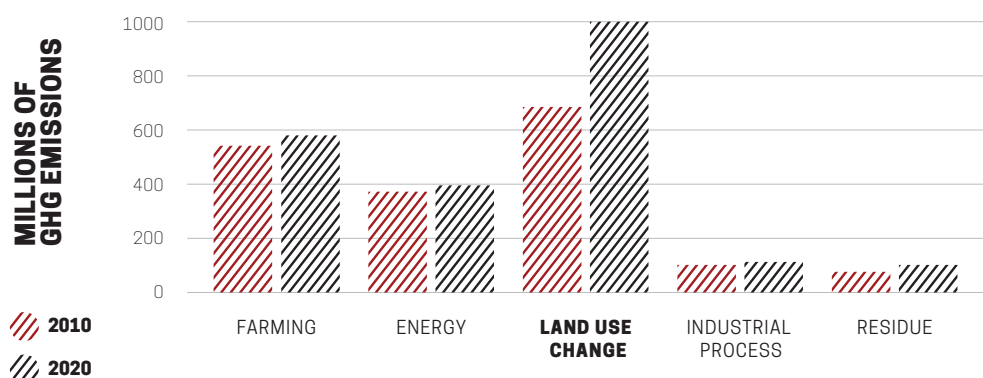
In this factsheet we illustrate how agribusiness practices are the main drivers of carbon emissions in Brazil and how the European pesticide industry is profiting from increased pesticide use while harming the health and destroying the environment of local populations. This is exactly the agribusiness model that the EU Mercosur trade deal is promoting and further expanding.



BRAZILIAN CARBON EMISSIONS ARE DRIVEN BY AGRIBUSINESS

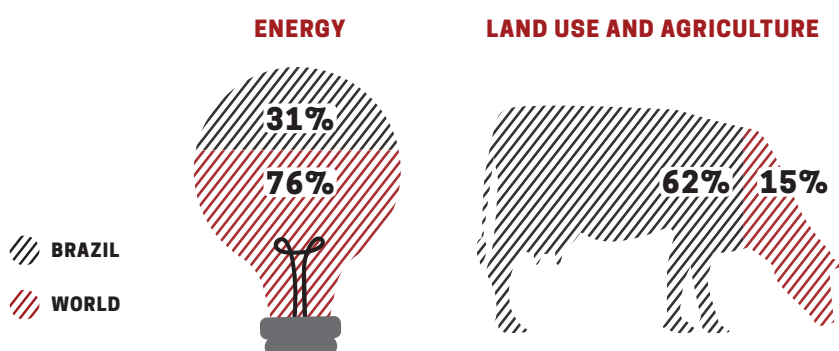
Most countries find energy use to be the main source of greenhouse gas emissions. But in Brazil, deforestation is the main culprit. Land use changes due to agribusiness, including degradation of forests, accounted for almost half of the emissions (49%) in 2021.

CHANGES IN BRAZILIAN EMISSIONS BY SECTOR 2010-2020



Source: Seeg (2021)⁶

LIQUID EMISSIONS OF GHG



Data referring to the year of 2019
compiled by Cebri (2021)

In fact, **between 90% and 99% of tropical rainforest deforestation worldwide is driven by agriculture³**. Most of the carbon emissions arise from deforestation to create pasture areas where cattle are raised - a staggering 79 million hectares of land in Brazil. The pasture areas degrade and release greenhouse gases from the soil.

Agribusiness' emissions impact doesn't end at deforestation. Other sector activities are also responsible for 25% of the Brazilian emissions. This category includes methane released by ruminant livestock, the management and disposal of livestock waste, irrigated rice cultivation, and the burning of agricultural residues from sugarcane and cotton cultivation.⁴

All damage added up, the agribusiness sector alone accounts for 74% of Brazilian emissions in 2021.⁵

So without changing the agribusiness model, deforestation rates and climate emissions are unlikely to go down substantially or will even continue to increase.

BRAZILIAN AGRIBUSINESS HAS CAUSED A 'LOST DECADE' OF CLIMATE ACTION

Brazil has lost a decade in the struggle to limit climate change. 2021 was supposed to mark the start of the implementation of Brazil's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement to limit global heating. But rather than reduce national greenhouse gas emissions, the reverse has happened.

Between the creation of the National Policy on Climate Change in December 2010⁷ and the supposed first year of implementation of the NDC in 2021, Brazil saw a 40% increase in gross emissions.⁸

Particularly the last few years, Brazil's emissions have spiralled at a disturbing rate, largely due to deforestation. In 2020, during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, greenhouse gas emissions in Brazil grew by 9.5%, while worldwide they dropped by almost 7%.⁹ In the following year, they grew a further 12.2%, their worst level of emissions since 2005.¹⁰

The only way to change this trajectory is a major reduction in deforestation and restoration of degraded areas. Brazil announced a target of carbon neutrality by 2050¹¹, but Brazilian civil society is calling for this to happen by 2045^{12,13}. **If the government does not put an end to illegal deforestation by 2028, it will be impossible for the country to achieve its goal**, even relying on new technologies that may reduce or offset emissions from other sources.¹⁴



PESTICIDE USE ON THE RISE, THREATENING HUMAN AND PLANETARY HEALTH

Agribusiness is killing the trees and choking the air - and contaminating human health too. As agribusiness booms, the use of harmful pesticides for its crops is becoming more widespread. Its use has clear consequences for nature, workers, and traditional communities.

The use of pesticides contaminates soil and water sources, sparks biodiversity loss and the destruction of insect populations necessary to maintain a balanced ecosystem.¹⁵

During Bolsonaro's presidency, there was a record number of registered pesticide poisonings in Brazil. **At least 14,000 people were poisoned by agrochemicals during his four year presidency.** Among them, there were at least 439 deaths - equivalent to one every three days.¹⁶ **This data is underreported, and even the Brazilian government suggests that the real number may be up to 50 times higher.**¹⁷

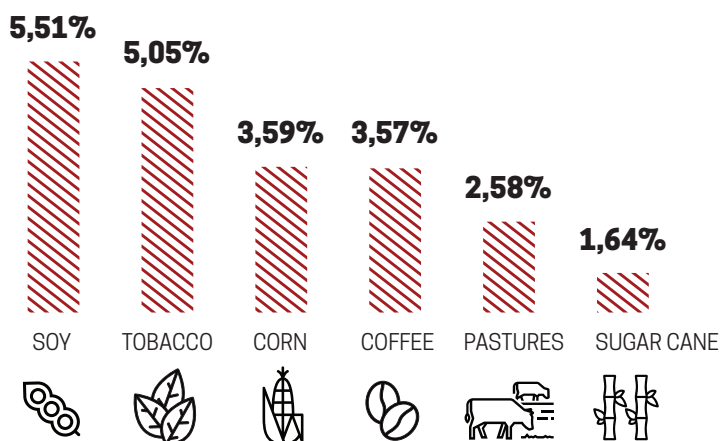
These poisonings are directly related to crops that are primarily for exported commodities. **Most of these registered poisonings are linked to soya plantations, a product that is promoted by the EU-Mercosur trade deal.**¹⁸

A recent case in Mato Grosso, the state in Brazil that produces the most soybeans, shows the dangerous impacts of pesticide contamination on human health and the livelihoods of organic farmers.

The pesticides used on soy plantations contaminated the water sources of local organic fruit farmer communities, making their agroecological work impossible. Not only did they suffer economic losses as they could not sell their products, the ingredients in the pesticides had serious health implications for the whole community. **Of the active ingredients detected in the region's waters, five are banned in European Union countries for representing risks to human health and the environment:** Atrazine, 2,4-D, Fipronil, Carbendazim, and Imidacloprid.¹⁹

The contamination spread further too: the toxic water ended up in the water tanks of the schools of the local farmers' children, and even into urban areas.

SOYBEAN PLANTATIONS ARE THE CROP WITH THE MOST RECORDS OF POISONINGS



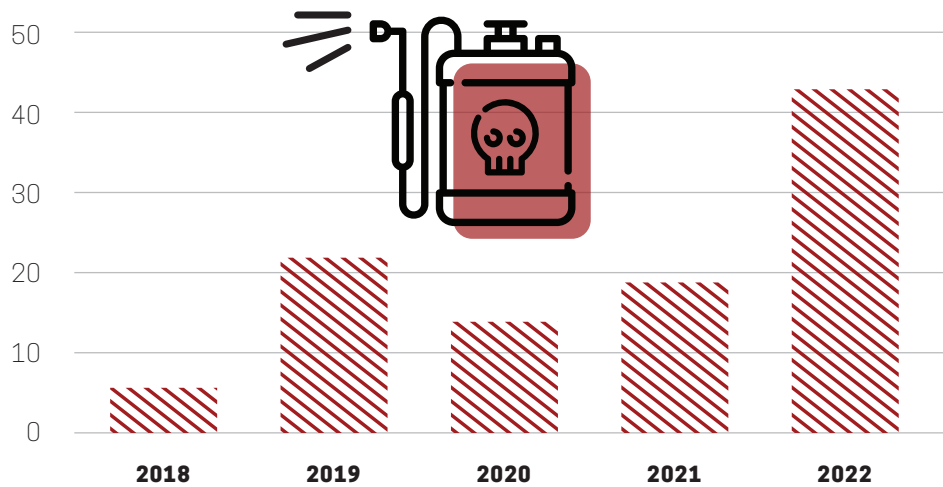
The increase in contaminations in Brazil is a clear consequence of weakened pesticide regulations in Brazil.

This is the result of heavy lobbying and influence by the pesticide industry on the Bolsonaro government. Brazil authorised new pesticides at breakneck speed during his four years as the President of the Republic.²⁰

Source: <https://data.apublica.org/brasil-pais-dos-agrotoxicos/>
Number of pesticides intoxications by crop between 2019 and 2022.

APPROVALS OF NEW PESTICIDES ON THE MARKET

PRODUCTS APPROVED FOR THE INDUSTRY AND FOR FARMERS' USE



Source: Ministry of Agriculture
data compiled by G1.

The manufacturers of those products include leading European pesticide manufacturers such as Bayer and Basf.²¹ The two corporations have been promoting the EU-Mercosur trade deal through lobby groups, and also push the government to weaken Brazil's pesticides regulation²²²³.

The two companies own around 12% of all pesticides products approved for use in Brazil.²⁴ Bayer alone owns 25% of the soy pesticide market in Brazil²⁵. **In 2021, BASF profited €3,3 billion from the sale of dangerous pesticides in Brazil.**²⁶

While these European companies are making record profits, local communities and organic farmers bear the brunt of the impacts of pesticide contamination.

Many of the crops treated by these hazardous chemicals are then exported to Europe and the wider world, leaving a trail of contamination in Brazil and globally. The banned pesticides end up on products as residues imported in the EU sold in European supermarkets.²⁷

The new Brazilian government has not yet made any move to remedy this situation.

In February of this year, the Ministry of Agriculture released or renewed 42 agrochemicals, including 24 that are not authorised for use in the European Union.²⁸



CONCLUSION

The EU-Mercosur free trade deal will offer corporate agribusiness a direct gateway to increase the unchecked use of toxic pesticides, undermining agroecological farming practices and propel deforestation in Brazil.²⁹

Photo: Bruno Kelly

The deal includes a reduction in existing tariffs on pesticides up to 90%, resulting in an even higher increase in the export of hazardous substances from the EU to South America.³⁰ The implications for public health and human rights are devastating.³¹

The European Commission long promised an environmental annex to safeguard the environment and human rights in the EU-Mercosur deal - but the leaked annex³² text shows no concrete or effective measures to do so. **The leaked additional instrument exposes a dangerous gap between the European Union's climate goals and commitments to protect human rights, and what it actually endorses behind closed doors.** Rather than offering genuine changes as the EU Commission claims it will, the proposed joint instrument only offers cosmetic, aspirational and unenforceable adjustments. There is no new measure included that will address the issues of deforestation, climate change, human rights violations, or animal welfare.

The Commission also said they first want to see positive changes on the ground, related to deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions and human rights. What we see is that in February, deforestation rates are higher than ever before. We also see that without a significant change of the agribusiness model, promoted by the EU-Mercosur trade deal, it is unlikely that climate emissions are going down.

The EU-Mercosur deal at its heart relies on the exploitation of land and people. The deal actively pushes South America further into ecological collapse, props up a destructive neo-colonial economic system and drives social inequalities. This cannot be addressed by an afterthought annex.

The trade deal flies in the face of all established science on what we need to guarantee a liveable future. The latest IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report highlights the critical need to rethink agricultural systems and calls for deep, rapid, and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions as a necessity to slow down global warming within the next two decades.³³

The solution is clear: drop the EU-Mercosur trade deal and redirect policy and funds into sustainable and regenerative economies reliant on agroecology and other sustainable modes of production.

This factsheet is the second in a series that is covering the most recent data and research regarding the state of agribusiness in Mercosur throughout 2023.



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Photo: Bruno Kelly

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