

# Media Briefing

Advance: Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> August 2004

## Rainforest On Your BBQ

It's August Bank Holiday weekend, and rain permitting, the garden chairs are out, the charcoal is lit and the barbecue is sizzling. But as Joe or Jodie Public adds another sausage, are they unwittingly contributing to the destruction of the world's last precious natural resources?

The destruction of the world's rainforests has almost become a cliché over recent years. Yet few people are aware that rapid rates of destruction continue and are even accelerating, driven by new trends. An area of rainforest larger than Poland (78 million acres) is being lost every year to unsustainable and illegal logging, creation of plantations and the roads needed to get to them.

A single acre of rainforest can contain as many different plant species as the whole of the UK. Indonesia, for example, supports around 10 per cent of all flowering plant species, despite covering only 1.3 per cent of the world's land surface. More than half of the world's estimated 10 million species of plants, animals and insects live in the tropical rainforests.

Human rights abuses are also a problem as companies move in to extract wealth from areas of forest traditionally inhabited by agricultural communities.

Few consumers are aware of the impacts of what they buy... but typical barbecue ingredients such as chicken, bread, burgers and crisps could all be contributing to rainforest destruction. Complex supply chains and inadequate labels mean that most consumers remain in the dark.

As the following briefing shows, there are reasons to worry. Our British barbecue habit may be burning up more than it should.

### What's On Your Barbecue

#### **1. Product: Chicken breasts/ drumsticks, pork sausages, beef burgers**

#### **Impact: Destruction of cerrado plains and Amazon rainforest in Brazil through soy farming**

Vegetarians use the slogan "meat is murder," but what exactly is being murdered? Industrial farming in the EU is currently driving a huge explosion in the export-led production of soy in South America. In Brazil, the area planted under soy grew by 109 per cent between 1995 and 2002, driven largely by the need to feed EU livestock. During the same period the UK's growth in imports of South American soybeans grew by more than 600per cent.<sup>i</sup> Most of

these imports were used for animal feed.

Brazilian soy is produced on capital intensive, large scale monoculture farms where virtually no species survive apart from the crop. Despite the myriad uses of soy in human food and in the production of vegetable oil, nearly all the soy imported to the EU (about 90 per cent) is crushed to be used in animal feed. The European Union is by far the most important market for South American soy, representing more than three quarters of the export market. It is estimated that every pig and chicken in the UK will have consumed South American soy at some point. With little land left to expand into, soy farms are now spreading into Central Brazil and Amazon rainforest regions.<sup>ii</sup>

In the Central and Western regions, soy farms are expanding into the South American *Cerrado* (savannah) habitat, which supports species such as jaguar, giant ant-eater and armadillo, replacing smallholder agriculture with massive farms run by big companies. Smallholders are sometimes forced to give up their land in order to create soy farms, losing income and land rights as a result.

The destruction of the Amazon hit the headlines once again last year when it was revealed that a massive jump of 40 per cent in the rate of deforestation had taken place in the previous year. Despite claims to the contrary by the Brazilian Government, it is undeniable that the large-scale spread of soya farming into the Southern Amazon rainforest is driving deforestation. A mere four per cent of the Amazon is protected by federal laws<sup>iii</sup> and the land is attractive to soybean producers because it is available and cheap.

The Amazon is one of the world's great last wildernesses, harbouring an estimated 30 per cent of all the world's known plant and animal species. In a single hectare of forest there may be as many as 300 tree species. Known as "the lungs of the planet" because it produces 20 per cent of the world's oxygen, the Amazon rainforest currently covers 1.2 billion acres – but it is estimated that more than 20 per cent of it has already been destroyed<sup>iv</sup>.

## **2. Product: Crisps, sauces, veggie burger**

### **Impact: Destruction of South East Asian rainforest through palm oil plantations**

Home to species such as the orangutan, Sumatran tiger and the Asian elephant, the forests of South-East Asia support a wealth of biodiversity. But they are disappearing at a frightening rate. More than 50 per cent of Indonesia's rainforests have now been completely cleared. The World Bank estimates that all the lowland forest in Sumatra will be destroyed by 2005 and in Kalimantan and Borneo by 2010.

What has this got to do with a packet of crisps or the mayonnaise and veggie burger on your barbecue? The missing link is a product known as palm oil, a vegetable oil produced on large-scale tropical plantations and exported to Europe. Though rarely labelled, it is estimated that palm oil is present in a massive one third of food products in the UK.

The rapid spread of palm oil plantations is a result of the plant's flexibility as a vegetable oil, combined with its fecundity, which makes production very competitive. But as a Friends of the Earth report revealed earlier this year, the rapid spread of palm oil plantations in South East Asia is destroying rainforests, putting endangered species at risk, and leading to problems with pollution<sup>v</sup>. In Indonesia nine million hectares of forest are at risk from the

expansion of the plantations. And as companies move in to plant palm oil, local communities are displaced, often without adequate compensation for their loss of land. Wages for plantation work are low and the work is insecure.

In 1997, forest fires swept across South-East Asia, casting a haze across the whole region. Satellite evidence tied the origin of many fires to palm oil plantations, where forest burning is used to clear areas ready for palm oil. Conflicts between local communities and palm oil companies are common and hundreds are continuing to this day. Pollution from the rivers and palm oil mills are poisoning water courses and killing aquatic life.

British manufacturers value the many uses of palm oil – but most do not even know where they get it from, let alone under what conditions it was produced. Palm oil is traded on the international commodity market, which are characterised by lack of transparency in supply chains, bulk importing, and a distancing of consumers from the social and environmental impacts of the products they consume. A recent survey undertaken by ISIS/Asset Management found out that 87 per cent of British companies did not know where their palm oil came from.

### **3. Product: barbecued prawns, shrimp salad** **Impact: destruction of mangrove forest**

A king-sized shrimp is a tasty delicacy for the upmarket barbecue – and little surprise, for Western tastes for the little crustacean have rocketed in recent years. Grilled, peeled or boiled – prawns have now moved from a luxury item to an accepted part of our daily lives.

The global prawn farming industry, which produces approximately one third of shrimp consumed worldwide, is now worth a staggering US\$50-60 billion at the point of retail – and nearly all of it is consumed in the developed world. Ninety nine per cent of prawn farming, in contrast, is undertaken in developing countries, for example Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam. But the development of shrimp farms is contributing to the destruction of mangrove forest, known as “the rainforest by the sea” and one of the world’s most threatened habitats. It is estimated that over half the world’s mangroves have been destroyed – and that shrimp farming (“aquaculture”) is responsible for as much as 38 per cent of that destruction.

Mangrove forests, which develop as semi-submerged areas on tropical coasts, are vital breeding grounds for many species of fish and shellfish, provide nesting sites for many shore birds and home to crab eating monkeys, fishing cats, lizards and sea turtles. Forming a crucial barrier between ocean and forest, they prevent the coast from eroding, reduce the risk of flooding and reduce storm damage. When they are lost, local populations become more vulnerable as food sources are lost. Precious land is eroded and salt water invades.

Recent work by the Environmental Justice Foundation shows that shrimp farming is associated with child labour, illegal land seizures, large scale destruction of mangrove forests, pollution of water and agricultural land, violence and intimidation. In 11 different tropical countries, people have been murdered in related conflicts<sup>vi</sup>.

Prawn fisheries, which are responsible for the other two thirds of shrimp production, are found in both temperate and tropical areas. Sadly they are not free of destruction - shrimp trawlers, particularly those in the tropics, can catch over 400 marine “non-target” species in

their nets. Despite producing less than two per cent of global seafood, shrimp fisheries alone are responsible for one-third of the world's discarded catch. In the tropics, bycatch levels of 20:1 have been recorded – meaning that for every kilogram (2.2 pounds) of prawns landed, up to 20 kilos of other species are also caught but thrown overboard, dead or dying.

#### **4. Product: Garden furniture**

**Impact: Unsustainable and illegal logging supplying the international timber trade is destroying old-growth forest throughout the tropics**

With the food all cooking, are you sitting comfortably? And where did the wood in your garden furniture come from? Tropical or temperate sources? And was the timber cut legally or illegally?

In 2000, a survey undertaken by Friends of the Earth found that of the 34 leading furniture suppliers, nearly three quarters made “green claims” about their timber sourcing for hardwood garden furniture – but only one fifth of them were able to credibly back these up. In the same year, Friends of the Earth study found that about half of the tropical timber imports to the European Union were illegally sourced - and the UK was the biggest importer of such wood. About 80 per cent of all logging in Brazil and Indonesia is illegal, with massive UK demand for tropical wood products helping to fuel this crime.

Under pressure from consumers, some British retailers have changed their practices over recent years. The development of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) “ecolabel” has facilitated this and given consumers a mechanism to recognise whether retailers care about where their timber comes from.

But British retailers and suppliers are still supplying illegally and unsustainably logged timber. Ninety five per cent of the international timber trade is *not* FSC certified. In June 2003 an investigation by Friends of the Earth revealed that Tesco, the UK's biggest retailer, was selling garden furniture made from illegally sourced Indonesian timber. The furniture was manufactured in Vietnam but made from logs illegally imported from Indonesia. More recently, a study by Greenpeace showed that high-street names Asda, Marks & Spencer and John Lewis were selling furniture products from unsustainable and possibly illegal sources.

#### **5. Product: charcoal**

**Impact: Limited impact because most charcoal is FSC certified; locally sourced charcoal is best**

And finally, the charcoal... In the UK, nearly all charcoal purchased is imported and is ultimately used in barbecues. In comparison to sourcing of garden furniture, a high proportion of charcoal is FSC-certified, leaving the consumer with greater confidence that their charcoal has been produced in a responsible fashion.

But more than 20 per cent of charcoal sold in the UK comes from tropical countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, Brazil, Indonesia and Brazil – and only one of these tropical timber suppliers provides FSC certified charcoal. So sadly some charcoal on British barbecues continues to burn up tropical forests.

The FSC is the only worldwide recognised standard that allows consumers to be sure that steps have been taken to produce timber according to high environmental and social standards. It is encouraging that the FSC charcoal market is healthy in the UK – but vital

that consumers continue to look out for the "tree and tick" logo that is their only guarantee that they will not be unwittingly implicated in tropical forest destruction.

### **Friends of the Earth says....**

Consumers don't want their pleasure spoiled by knowing that they are contributing to environmental destruction and human rights' abuses on the other side of the world. And many companies are doing their best to persuade us that there isn't a problem by making claims about the "sustainability" of their products. As this briefing shows, often they cannot live up to their promises and the destruction goes on.

A few examples, such as the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), show what can be done when companies really want to make a difference. A well-established and monitored standard can provide consumers with a guarantee that the product they are buying has been produced according to set social and environmental criteria. But such schemes only apply to a small selection of the wide range of products sold in our shops. Given the choice, most companies choose not to implement such standards – so palm oil, soy and shrimp turn up in the products on our shelves with no guarantees of their origins. And with little pressure to do anything about the impacts, companies chose to do nothing.

These products clearly illustrate the inadequacy of current social and environmental reporting methods – left to the whim and inclination of individual companies. Friends of the Earth believes legislation on corporate accountability, covering social and environment reporting, is required and is therefore a founding member of the Corporate Responsibility Coalition (CORE). CORE pulls together environment, human rights and development organisations, think-tanks, progressive companies and trade unions to campaign for changes to UK company law. Members of the coalition include Amnesty International (UK), Christian Aid, GMB Union, National Union of Journalists (NUJ), New Economics Foundation, Oxfam, Traidcraft, Unison and Unity Trust Bank.

The CORE Coalition is campaigning for changes to UK company law so that financial obligations are counterbalanced by social and environmental concerns. Specifically, the Government must introduce:

- Mandatory reporting – requiring all UK companies to report annually on the impact of their operations, policies, products and procurement practices on people and the environment both in the UK and abroad
- New legal duties on directors – to take reasonable steps to reduce any significant negative social or environmental impacts
- Foreign direct liability – to enable affected communities abroad to seek redress in the UK for human rights and environmental abuses resulting directly from the operations, policies, products and procurement practices of UK companies or their overseas subsidiaries

These measures would change the social and environmental reports of UK companies – and more importantly their performance. A duty to report on the significant negative impacts of business operations and products would require them to recognise the impacts of buying products like palm oil and a duty on directors to take reasonable steps to reduce these impacts would force them to consider how to support the production of more sustainable palm oil.

It is only when these measures are implemented that consumers can feel truly secure about the safety of their barbecues – or any of the other products on their shelves.

For more information on the CORE Coalition, and the Corporate Responsibility Bill see:  
[www.corporate-responsibility.org](http://www.corporate-responsibility.org)

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<sup>i</sup> Dros, JM & Kriesch M (2003). *GM free soy for Europe*. AIDE Environment.

[http://www.wwf.ch/images/progneut/upload/GM%20 free Soy for Europe.pdf](http://www.wwf.ch/images/progneut/upload/GM%20free_Soy_for_Europe.pdf)

Dros, JM (2004). Impacts of soy production on South American Forest Ecosystems. Unpublished briefing.

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<sup>ii</sup> Jaccoud D, Lemos de Sá R & Richardson S (2003). *Sustainability assessment of export-led growth in soy production in Brazil*. WWF.

<sup>iii</sup> Production Estimates and Crop Assessment Division: Foreign Agricultural Service (2004) *The Amazon: Brazil's Final Soybean Frontier*

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.rain-tree.com/facts.htm>

<sup>v</sup> [http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/greasy\\_palms\\_summary.pdf](http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/reports/greasy_palms_summary.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> See <http://www.ejfoundation.org/index.html>