

Deforestation is complex — as is the solution

What causes deforestation varies between regions, so the appropriate solutions also differ, argue the Wageningen geo-information and remote sensing researchers Martin Herold and Niki de Sy in response to a report by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) on deforestation.

The WWF concludes that global forest cover is shrinking, with an area the size of the Netherlands lost to deforestation each year. Deforestation is a problem in particular in Brazil, Bolivia, Indonesia and Malaysia. In its press release, the WWF emphasizes soybean cultivation as a driver of deforestation, the imports of soy-based animal feed to Europe and Europeans' responsibility to

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reduce the meat in their diet. That analysis is valid but not the whole story, says De Sy, who provided data for the WWF report.

Firstly, the EU is no longer the world's biggest soy importer — that

is now China. What is more, the cultivation of export crops is just one aspect of the problem: as the WWF states, EU imports of food and energy crops only account for 10 per cent of global deforestation.

'Many countries exploit the forests for development. Livestock farming, mining, logging — various economic sectors are using forested land,' says De Sy. 'And both large agricultural businesses and small farmers cut down trees.'

Herold studies deforestation in Africa. Satellite images show that in Congo in particular, deforestation has increased recently. This is mainly due to small-scale illegal logging and tree felling by local groups. Congo needs stronger government action on forestry management and enforcement plus fast satellite imaging in order to combat illegal logging, says Herold.

He believes the focus in tackling deforestation should be on sustainable land use. While a reduction in large-scale soybean and palm oil cultivation can be a part of the approach, sustainable agriculture, reforestation and landscape restoration are also important. AS