



THE FACTS

BRAZILIAN DEFORESTATION CAUSED BY LIVESTOCK FARMERS?

Dutch farmers are responsible for a lot of global deforestation, wrote Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* on 14 April following a report by WWF. In the Facts section, we check whether this is correct. Text Albert Sikkema

The issue

The *Volkskrant* article was prompted by a report published by the international nature organization WWF. ‘The report shows that the Netherlands is one of the biggest European importers of soya. Dutch farmers use soya as animal feed, which is ultimately re-exported as meat. Partly because of this, the Netherlands is responsible for the clearance of nearly 30,000 hectares of virgin forest and other forms of nature every year.’ WWF also published a report on deforestation three months ago. Then too, the WWF press release and various media drew a link between deforestation and the use of soya-based animal feed in the Netherlands. WUR researcher Niki de Sy, who supplied information for the WWF report, called that analysis ‘correct but one-sided’.

The facts

First, WWF presented deforestation figures for the period 2005 to 2017. In that period, about five million hectares of nature were turned into farmland every year. What caused this deforestation, according to the report? About one third of the new farmland was used to grow soya for animal feed, and two thirds was

used for other agricultural products such as palm oil, coffee, cocoa and beef. Secondly, WWF used soya import figures, which made the Netherlands a major source of deforestation: 30,000 hectares a year. But a lot of the soya entering the port of Rotterdam is re-exported, in particular to Germany. Statistics Netherlands reports that soya imports in the first six months of 2020 totalled 1.3 billion euros while exports in the same period were 1 billion euros. The exports include processed, more expensive soya so these sums don’t necessarily correspond to the same number of kilos. Even so, we can safely conclude that at most a third of the imported soya ends up with Dutch livestock farmers. So 10,000 hectares at most.

But is this lower deforestation figure correct? According to the WWF report, deforestation due to EU soya imports fell by 40 per cent between 2005 and 2017. That was because more and more soya had sustainability certification, saying that no deforestation had taken place. In 2018, 62 per cent of the soya imported by the EU had a sustainability certificate. What percentage of Dutch animal feed is sustainable? All of it, says Nevedi, the association for the Dutch animal feed

sector. Dutch farmers use just over half of one per cent of all the soya produced globally, says Nevedi. ‘All the soya used in the Netherlands for animal feed is certified and meets strict sustainability criteria.’ Interestingly, WWF knows this as it joined Nevedi and Unilever in establishing the Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS) and the EU Soy Sourcing Guidelines.

That puts the deforestation due to Dutch livestock farmers at zero hectares. What WWF wants to achieve with its report is for *all* soya imports to the EU to meet these sustainability criteria — or even stricter rules. WWF is targeting the EU as the latter will be proposing legislation on deforestation in May.

The conclusion

Global deforestation is still continuing at a frightening rate. The EU can help stop this by making sure all soya imports are sustainable. But Dutch livestock farmers already use sustainable animal feed anyway.