Cerrado Citizen Manifest

FOR A TRANSPARENT TRADE AGREEMENT THAT RESPECTS PEOPLE AND ECOSYSTEMS

FREE TRADE AGREEMENT MERCOSUR EUROPEAN UNION

WERVEL

This is an urgent citizen request !

This is an urgent citizen request for rebalancing the EU-Mercosur free trade agreement. According to the authors of this manifest much more attention should be given to fair and sustainable food systems, to the preservation of fragile ecosystems, and to communities.

In this manifest, the geographical focus is on the Cerrado in Brazil, a large savannah area increasingly cleared for industrial crops, mainly soy, and cattle breeding. This land use damages and even erases biodiversity, water systems, and rural and native communities. Huge quantities of the agro-industrial products are exported to Europe to support its own meat industry and consumption. The EU-Mercosur free trade agreement should as a minimum ensure traceability, transparency, and sustainability of agricultural goods. As part of a restored balance, the EU and Belgium should also increase efforts to reduce dependency on protein imports, and enable a transition towards more local and sustainable food and agriculture, whilst exploring alternative Brazilian markets offering sustainable goods produced by communities and enterprises that fundamentally respect the richness of the Cerrado landscapes and cultures.

Please sign the manifest as an individual or an organisation.
We will then hand the manifest with your signatures to European deputies and Belgium policy-makers to require transparent trade, a healthier agri-food system and a healthier planet.

Sign the manifest

Key Recommendations

We urge governments at all levels - municipal, provincial, federal, and European - to set guidelines for the MERCOSUR - European Union agreement in order to set specific limits.

The European Union (EU) should at least:
ensure the EU Mercosur agreement includes specific, binding requirements that:

- **Halt imported deforestation and ecosystem destruction triggered by the trade agreement**
- **Guarantee the traceability of imported agricultural products**
- **Set up a reliable and transparent system that respects human rights, halts deforestation and engenders net positive impacts on biodiversity, climate, water systems, and communities.**

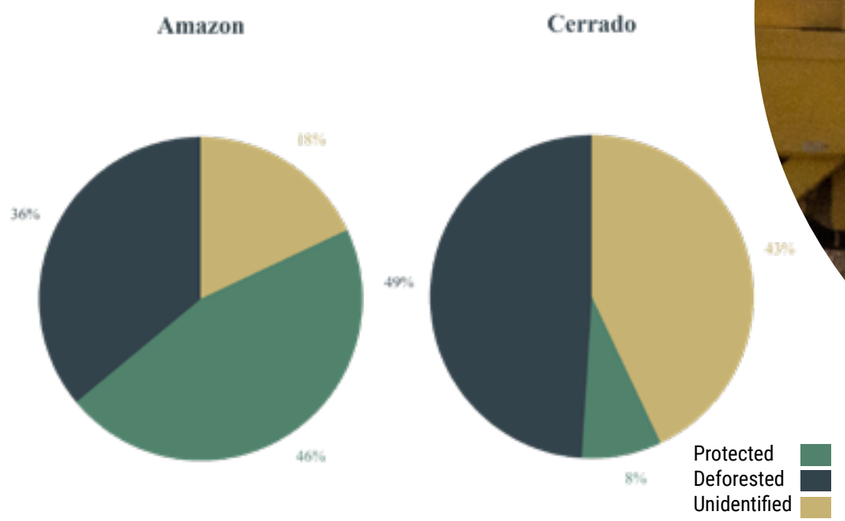
- **Install a participatory and transparent process to agree on the above binding requirements in the EU Mercosur agreement with strong participation of civil society**
- **Implement a new EU legislation on forest and ecosystem risk commodities to address deforestation, forest degradation, ecosystem conversion and degradation, as well as the protection of human rights.[1]**
- **Avoid unfair competition for EU and Belgian agriculture by importing goods that do not comply with minimum social and environmental standards.**
- **Inform consumers clearly and consistently about products derived from animals fed on GMOs and about the social and environmental damage caused by current crop production in monoculture especially soybeans**
- **Reduce the EU's dependence on Latin American soybeans by increasing Europe's autonomy in sustainable protein production**
- **Support European farmers in a transition to diversify activities and income and enable change towards a food system with a low carbon impact.**

1 https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12137-Minimising-the-risk-of-deforestation-and-forest-degradation-associated-with-products-placed-on-the-EU-market

The Belgian/Flemish/Walloon governments should

- **Reject the EU-Mercosur Agreement in its current form**
  and lobby for inclusion of binding requirements to guarantee traceability, zero deforestation, and human rights
- **Limit the import of soy**
  and other forest-and-ecosystem-risk commodities in their territories
- **Apply high traceability and sustainability requirements and regulations to Mercosur products**
- **Support Belgian farmers to increase their protein and feed autonomy**
- **Avoid supporting food production and manufacturing of goods that are dependent on the import of forest-and-ecosystem-risk commodities.**

The cerrado



The cerrado,
a little-known world heritage

The Cerrado, a wooded savannah with a variety of ecosystems, is the primary victim of agricultural expansion in Brazil. It occupies ¼ of Brazilian land, represents 30% of national biodiversity and 5% of global biodiversity.
Agricultural expansion led to the destruction of its habitats. This endangers the regional climate regime, depletes vital resources such as soil fertility and drinking water.
If the situation in the Amazon is worrying, the figures on the Cerrado are, by far, much more alarming. 49% of Cerrado has already been victim to deforestation- which corresponds to the area of Venezuela, while only 8% of its territory is protected.

The Cerrado is the only Brazilian biome that connects the Amazon, the Atlantic forest Atlantic forest, the Caatinga and the Pantanal. Those biomes are interconnected and depend on each other for climate regulation, water balance, biodiversity and ecological corridors. The Cerrado is the cradle of Brazilian waters. Sources ; located i in itsthe highlands , its sources feed 8 of the 12 immense Brazilian hydrographic basins.

The Cerrado also encompasses 109 Indigenous Peoples territories, covering 4,35% of its area, territories which are among the most preserved.The disappearance of 1061 Cerrado' species, as the giant anteater and maned wolf, represents the extinction of an unprecedented natural genetic heritage. It also means a loss of medical and food resources. The Plants of Cerrado are known to offer unique characteristics in terms of nutritional and healing properties; these plant species include, but are not limited to, araticum-do-cerrado, baru, buriti, cagaita, cajuzinho-do-cerrado, guabiroba, jatobá, mamacadela, mangaba and pequi.

The agreement also threatens other vital biomes such as the Pampas or the Chaco in Argentina are also under threat, but this manifest aims to generate broader visibility to the Cerrado hotspot.

A soybean divides

In the Cerrado, soybeans are being cultivated on huge plots of land owned by powerful landowners and concerns, and then sold for domestic consumption and in huge quantities for export.
Food exports economically strengthen these actors who already have high incomes, further widening inequality. The victims are the most vulnerable populations, who don't - or hardly - have land rights and already suffer from food insecurity, in particular workers, indigenous peoples, Afro-American descendants, peasants, women and landless peasants.

The big landowners reign through the use of weapons, which are authorised and widespread. Dignified working conditions are often not not necessarily guaranteed; neither is the use of personal protective equipment for workers exposed to pesticides.

Modern slavery still exists in Brazil, in particular via debt systems. It is also estimated that the country has close to 1 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 forced into child labour, 56% of them part of the labor force in the agricultural sector.

Soybeans, along with other commodities – such as corn, coffee, wheat, sugar cane, wheat and others - are a very profitable crop for large producers. The lure of profit drives reinforces deforestation and ecosystem conversion, which is in full swing. This profitability can be explained, in particular, because the negative externalities of this culture for the society and the environment are not paid for.

The negative externalities of agriculture

The Cerrado concentrates fifteen million hectares of soy (90% of all agriculture in the biome) and 40 million cattle heads. In Brazil, agribusiness exports correspond to roughly 40% of the total annual external trade, with the soy industry accounting for approximately 25% of this total. Between 2005 and 2017, soy production in the Cerrado accounted for 45% of the total volume produced in Brazil.

Soybeans, planted on thousands of hectares as far as the eye can see - a green desert - are exported on a massive scale to Europe, including Belgium, to produce feed for livestock production and biofuel. Crops such as soybeans, beans, corn, and others are growning during the rainy season.

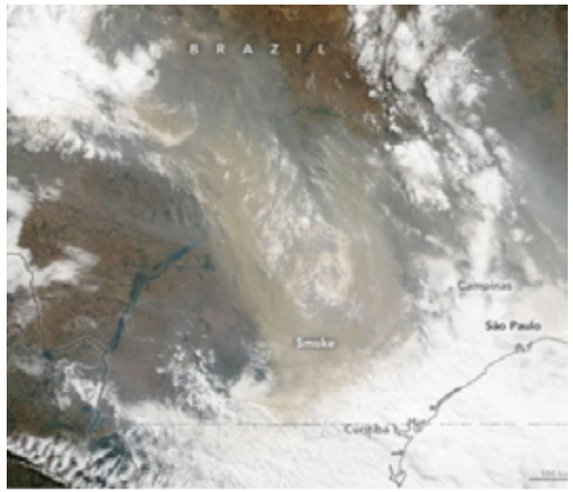
The soil usually hosts several crops (soybeans, beans, corn, etc.) during the rainy season. Afterwards, the land is exposed to strong sunlight during the four-month seasonal drought. The high temperatures, plowing and surface runoff of water, which can no longer infiltrate the compacted soils, create a worrying leaching and erosion processes, leading to the loss of natural capital accumulated over thousands of years. The destructuring of soils and the loss of fertility and micro-fauna and flora threaten long-term productivity. The Cerrado, once an exuberant savannah, literally turns to dust.

93% of soy is a GMO. Even when neglecting the ethical discussion around the modification of living beings, GMOs are problematic as they can only grow when phytosanitary products and synthetic fertilisers are applied. The use of pesticides kills invasive plants, but at the same time, the micro-organisms necessary for the maintenance of living soil. An approach focused on the natural fertility of the soil would be more productive in the long term and would lead to beneficial ecosystem services for communities.

The Brazilian forest law provides for the demarcation of protected areas on farms, however this rule is largely ignored, and the Brazilian State has no direct control over what happens on farms.

The agricultural practice of slash-and-burn is common in the Cerrado and are aggravated by arson linked to deforestation. 50% of Brazilian fires observed by NASA in 2019 were in the Cerrado, 34% in the Amazon.
These smoke trails release significant levels of CO_2 into the atmosphere. This practice depletes the natural capital of soils in the long term and significantly reduce savannah capacity to sequestrate carbon and absorb water. On-site, deforestation is synonymous with thick smoke, seen from the sky and affecting people's breathing.
The conversion of native vegetation into monocultures changes the precipitation regime. Cities such as Brasilia, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo depend on the water reservoirs of the Cerrado. The recent water shortage in these towns is to a great deal the consequence of land use changes in the Cerrado.

Savanna Fire



Europe's addiction to soy

5.2 million hectares - almost twice the size of Belgium - are cultivated in Brazil to export soybeans to Europe.
87% of this soy is intended to feed livestock, in order to breed chickens, pigs and cattle. Through the consumption of products derived from livestock, Europeans consume an average of 61kg of soy per year.

In 2017, 48.5 million tons of soy were produced, out of which roughly 34.5 million were mainly exported to China (57.5%) and Europe (34%), being the main importers The Netherlands, Spain, Belgium, France and Germany.
European protein production is insufficient to meet demand and is therefore dependent upon Brazilian, Argentinian and North American soy.

Europe needs to gradually decrease this dependency and enable more autonomy in terms of proteins, while transforming its food system. This must be done by strengthening the production of rapeseed, sunflower and other oilseeds rich in proteins, while encouraging responsible consumption and a change to sustainable diets with lower meat and dairy consumption.

Imports, unavoidable today, must be gradually reduced. The transparency mechanisms mentioned in the EU-MERCOSUR trade agreement must ensure flawless traceability of agricultural products, which is not the case today in Brazil. These imports must be considered as the main driver of deforestation, a threat to life on earth and risk for ecosystems collapse and climate change.
The agreement and its implementation, must - out of respect for life and survival of citizens - require regulated and sustainable food production at different scales.

Regulation and Labels

The EU needs to adopt a legislation placing an obligation on companies to exercise due diligence with regard to human rights abuses and environmental harm throughout their operations and supply chains. This regulation should include specific rules around forest and savannah risk commodities such as soy, and include a mandatory requirement for companies to file a report on every import stating that the commodities have been produced in accordance with standards that can be independently verified.
Europe and Belgium must in the meantime require at least quality labels on all imported products. These certification systems, organised by sector, would guarantee the traceability of imported soybeans to ensure zero deforestation. This implies restricting the import to soybeans that comply with minimal requirements, such as:

- non-GMO certified
- from sustainable agriculture, which limits the quantity and toxicity of pesticides and fertilisers and which incorporates practices such as
1. crop rotation,
2. semi-direct,
3. fallow periods and
4. the integration of agriculture, forest and livestock.
- fair-trade, which supports family farming and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.
- deforestation and ecosystems destruction-free, including not being the cause of destruction of sustainable traditional crop systems

To bring about this change, the price of GMO soybeans must be reassessed upwards and include the costs of its net environmental and social negative impact (true cost accounting); what is not reflected on current prices.
Consumers should be made aware of the consequences of eating soy indirectly through animal products in their diet. This manifest explicitly calls on politicians to put in place an information system so that products derived from farms fed on GM soybeans are labelled as such. On meat and dairy products, the labelling must inform the consumer of the origin of GMO soybeans and the proportion of this in animal feed.

From farm to fork

Whether in Latin America or the European Union, it is urgent and necessary to promote a transition of food and agriculture systems with concrete measures.

Food: consumption must increasingly be based on local or regional and sustainable sources, encouraging sustainable certification. Consumers should be encouraged to adopt sustainable, healthy and low-carbon diets, which involves a reasoned consumption of animal products and more fruits and vegetables.

Agriculture: producers and especially livestock farmers must be allowed to continue to live with dignity, and be free from unfair competition. This would be possible by promoting family agriculture in Belgium, anchored in the land, which diversifies its sources of income and its activities, and produces feed locally for its livestock, favouring pastures and limiting the use of cereals and other ingredients competing with human food. The Belgian Regions and the European Union should support livestock farmers who wish to convert to production systems that comply with planetary boundaries such as agroecological and agroforestry systems.

In the current situation and due to rarefaction of arable land and resources (including phosphorus), food shortages are not an impossible scenario in the future. Where possible, governments must promote short local, municipal, provincial or European food chains in order to increase autonomy and food sovereignty.

Images:
Flower p1+ plantation p15: Louise Amand,
Megaphone p2 vecteezy.com,
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Agroecology and agroforestry

Brazil, and in particular the Cerrado, has incredible potential to reverse the degradation process, restore natural capital and mitigate climate change. Further conversions of natural vegetation to pasture and croplands are not needed to enhance food production in Brazil.
As a sign of hope, a growing number of Brazilian producers are converting to organic, agroecological and sometimes agroforestry farming. Agro-ecologically managed farm systems can function like a sponge and retain quantities of water through its trees and humus-rich soil. The installation of agroforestry plots, which combines market gardening production with orchards, livestock or forestry, has many advantages linked to the high biodiversity and productivity of these plots. Agroforestry is recognised to increase resilience in the face of climatic shocks such as floods or drought. This model delivers multiple ecosystem services such as water purification, improved soil fertility and carbon sequestration.
A productive area with trees also helps moderate excessive temperatures. That's why Via Campesina states family farmers can cool the planet.
These agroecological, organic and agroforestry models have already demonstrated their economic viability and profitability thanks to the establishment of solidarity systems with consumers. Agroforestry and agroecological systems can deliver more food per square meter than monocrop plantation.
These systems benefit producers, the environment, as well as rural and urban communities. The European Union must put in place mechanisms to strengthen these models, in Brazil and Europe, in particular through support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.

WERVEL

Wervel is the movement for healty agriculture.
We are situated in Flanders, Belgium
Wervel aims for socially fair, culturally embedded and ecological restorative foodsystem.
wervel.be
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