

Global consumption an increasingly significant driver of tropical deforestation

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The EU and China are the largest importers of carbon dioxide emissions linked to deforestation for the production of beef, soy, palm oil and timber between 2000-2009. The researchers have focused on seven countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea), all of which are major exporters of goods that contribute to deforestation. Credit: Center for Global Development

International trade with agricultural and wood products is an increasingly important driver of tropical deforestation. More than a third of recent deforestation can be tied to production of beef, soy, palm oil and timber. "The trend is clear, the drivers of deforestation have been globalized and commercialized", says assistant professor Martin Persson, Chalmers University of Technology.

In a report commissioned by US think-tank Center for Global Development (CGD) Martin Persson and colleagues in Linköping, Sweden, and Vienna, Austria, have investigated to which extent [international trade](#) in agricultural and silvicultural products drives deforestation in seven case countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea.

"From having been caused mainly by smallholders

and production for local markets, an increasing share of deforestation today is driven by large-scale [agricultural production](#) for international markets. More than a third of global deforestation can be tied to rising production of beef, soy, [palm oil](#) and [wood products](#)," says Martin Persson.

"If we exclude Brazilian beef production, which is mainly destined for domestic markets, more than half of deforestation in our case countries is driven by international demand."

The research group has also analyzed the magnitude of the associated carbon dioxide emissions embodied in these trade flows. In total 1.7 billion tons of [carbon dioxide emissions](#) can be linked to the production of the analyzed commodities, with one third being embodied in commodity exports. The biggest recipients of these embodied carbon emissions are China and the EU. By elucidating the links between consumption and environmental impacts, the aim is to identify more effective measures to address tropical forest loss by targeting key commodities and countries.

"Another key trend is that more and more corporations have pledged to rid their supply chains from deforestation. Pushed by environmental organizations and seeing the risks of being associated with environmental destruction, companies like Unilever and McDonalds are pressuring their suppliers to stop expanding production on forest land," says Martin Persson.

It is no longer enough to just focus on the countries where [deforestation](#) happens and the potential policy measures available there, he adds.

"Today both public and private consumers, be it individuals or corporations, have the possibility to contribute to the protection of tropical forests by holding suppliers accountable for the environmental impacts of their production," Martin Persson concludes.

More information:

www.cgdev.org/publication/trade-emissions-tropical

Provided by Chalmers University of Technology
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