



**Friends of
the Earth
Europe**



Repórter Brasil

Brazilian meat and the EU-Mercosur agreement

Media Briefing

MOBILISE! RESIST! TRANSFORM!

Key findings

- The EU is a key importer of meat and agricultural products from four Brazilian meat multinationals, all linked to deforestation, biodiversity loss, forced labour and the violation of rights of indigenous people.
- The proposed EU-Mercosur trade deal will increase the export of beef and other meat products from these multinationals and exacerbate the abuses and environmental impact in their supply chains.
- This is happening while deforestation skyrockets and Brazil rolls back legislation to protect the environment and human rights.
- The Brazilian multinationals have failed to monitor human rights and environmental standards in their supply chain for over a decade.
- European supermarkets are already selling Brazilian meat products and this will increase.
- Friends of the Earth Europe calls on the EU to drop the EU Mercosur trade deal and introduce binding legislation to hold transnational corporations accountable for harms in their supply chains.

Introduction

The European Council are close to signing a free trade deal between the European Union and Mercosur member countries. If it is, the deal could increase the imports of Brazilian meat to the EU drastically, including a 30% increase in imports from the whole Mercosur region. This will benefit meat multinationals like JBS that are linked to deforestation, environmental crimes, forced labour and violations of indigenous land rights.

The toxic products of these multinationals are already on the shelves of our local supermarkets in Europe and the plates of European consumers. Our 'mystery meat' shopping action (Annex 1) shows beef products from these multinationals in major European retailers including Aldi, Edeka, Metro, Carrefour, Albert Heijn, Tesco, and Sainsbury's. An EU-Mercosur trade deal will further increase the amount of 'toxic' Brazilian meat in our supermarkets.

Within Mercosur, Brazil is the leading trade partner of the EU and the largest exporter of agricultural products to the EU. But business practices from European meat processing corporations also fall far short of acceptable environmental and human rights standards, as we have seen in recent scandals in Germany and the Netherlands¹². The European meat sector also depends largely on soy from abroad, including South America, which itself causes significant harms in its production.

If this deal is signed, it will undermine the aims of the European Green Deal and push a sustainable future for food production further from reach.

¹ <https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-coronavirus-highlights-scandalous-conditions-in-germanys-meat-industry/a-53397570>

² <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/vleesbedrijf-zet-werknemers-onder-druk-om-corona-te-verzwijgen~b939ef65/>

Multinational meat companies

Brazil is the worlds largest beef exporter. In 2020, Brazilian meat exports made up 24% of global trade³. Cattle-farming areas cover 19% of the country’s territory. It also is the second biggest poultry producer after the United States.

Four meat processing companies dominate the Brazilian meat industry: JBS, BRF, Marfrig, and Minerva. They have all expanded their industrial operations in other countries, including the European food market. JBS, Marfrig and Minerva - make up 92% of beef exports to the EU.

Their funders include traditional banks, investment funds and other conglomerates⁴. Most are based in the United States and in European countries.



In 2017, these four meat giants were involved in a major food safety scandal⁵. These companies had bribed health officials into approving the sale and exports of contaminated meat, adding chemicals to get rid of odour of rotten meat. The EU temporarily banned products entering their markets. JBS has also been involved in high level corruption, bribing hundreds of politicians⁶.

³ <https://www.fas.usda.gov/data/livestock--and-poultry-world-markets-and-trade>

⁴ <https://www.climatica.lamarea.com/santander-carnicas-brasil-amazonia/>

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/world/americas/brazil-food-companies-bribe-scandal-salmonella.html>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jul/02/swashbuckling-meat-tycoons-nearly-brought-down-a-government-brazil>

What's the problem with increasing the import of Brazilian meat?

Increasing the trade of Brazilian meat from these multinationals will:

- Cause an **increase in global greenhouse gas emissions** from bilateral trade in these products of around 34%, mainly coming from beef exports⁷. Agriculture and livestock accounted for 80% of greenhouse gas emissions in Brazil between 1990 and 2018.
- Accelerate the export-led production of Brazilian meat and other key agricultural products like soy that **drive deforestation and biodiversity loss** and undermine work towards climate-resilient and sustainable agricultural production and local production chains. A Greenpeace survey found that approximately 90% of the Amazon forest fires were connected to livestock⁸.
- **Throw the rights of indigenous and traditional communities under the bus**. The expansion of cattle and livestock-farming land encroaches on their territories and is often accompanied by violent landgrabs, increased land conflicts, and violent attacks towards local communities and environmental defenders.
- **Increase meat production linked to slave labour and unfair working conditions**. Illegal debts, intimidation, armed surveillance and geographic isolation are used as mechanisms to restrict workers' freedom of movement, keeping them tied to the jobs in the Brazilian meat industry.

Land conflicts, attacks on indigenous peoples' rights, and illegal deforestation have all been growing under the administration of President Jair Bolsonaro. Despite years of devastating deforestation and forest fires, Bolsonaro's administration has actively dismantled social and environmental protection structures. Between Bolsonaro's election in August 2018 and July 2019, deforestation in indigenous lands increased 174% above average.

For more than a decade, Brazil's major meat companies have been promising to uphold human rights and environmental standards in their supply chains, yet fail to do so. Their monitoring and enforcement failures mean that cattle-laundering - where cattle are transferred to areas where they are raised without the environmental restrictions in place before being sold to a 'clean' farm - persists in their supply chains.

⁷ <https://grain.org/en/article/6355-eu-mercosur-trade-deal-will-intensify-the-climate-crisis-from-agriculture>

⁸ <https://noticias.uol.com.br/meio-ambiente/ultimas-noticias/redacao/2019/08/30/queimadas-na-amazonia-sao-9-vezes-maiores-em-pastagens-que-em-area-agricola.htm?cmpid=copiaecola>

Brazilian meat sold in Europe



Corned beef from Brazil in Edeka in Germany. Credit: FoEE Brazilian beef in METRO in Hungary. Credit: FoE Hungary

Over 74% of beef imports into the EU came from Mercosur countries in 2019, of which over 35% was from Brazil⁹. The EU also receives 34.2% of Brazil processed meat products like canned meats, beef jerky, and nuggets¹⁰. Mercosur countries have also been increasingly relying on feedlots, which are harmful to the environment and animals, to gain duty-free access to the EU market¹¹.

Here are four examples of Brazilian meat from the four meat giants being processed and distributed by major retailers in the EU. The results were obtained through investigations by Repórter Brasil, and through member groups at Friends of the Earth Europe checking supermarkets in-store and online.

- **Schwarz Group**

Controlling Lidl and Kaufland, Europe’s largest retailer group supplies these chains with Brazilian animal protein. An example is canned meat manufactured by JBS and sold by Lidl under its private label Newgate.

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/food-farming-fisheries/farming/documents/eu-bovine-trade_en.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2019/july/brazil-once-again-becomes-the-world-s-largest-beef-exporter/>

¹¹ https://www.eurogroupforanimals.org/sites/eurogroup/files/2020-06/Eurogroup%20for%20Animals%20-%20Report%20-%20Animal%20Protection_in_EU_Mercosur%20Agreement.pdf

- **Aldi**
The German corporation, with units in several European countries, sells Brazilian beef which can be found at its stores in the UK and Germany.
- **Carrefour**
In 2019, an Earthsight investigation¹² found JBS beef products being sold at Carrefour stores in Belgium, including beef jerky made in Brazil – processed by Meat Snacks Partners, do Brasil Ltda, a Brazilian subsidiary of JBS, and processed products that use Brazilian poultry.
- **Casino**
French supermarket group Casino, which also manages the Spar chain, sells beef products from Brazil linked to slave labour and illegal deforestation. Recently, a group of international NGOs and indigenous communities filed a lawsuit for violations of human rights and the environment in Casino's supply chain¹³.

Other retailers including Sainsbury's, Rewe, Albert Heijn and Tesco are also linked to these four Brazilian meat multinationals.

What will the EU-Mercosur deal change?

- **Mercosur countries will export more meat to the EU**, including an extra 99,000 tons of beef a year, undermining local production chains in Mercosur and EU and contributing to further deforestation, climate change impacts and human rights problems.
- **Exemptions from food safety controls.** Once a meat processing place in Brazil is accepted, there will be fewer controls when the meat arrives in Europe.
- **Increased trade in pesticide products.** Currently 149 pesticides used in Brazil are banned in Europe. The deal will lower tariffs for more imports of toxic products, like soy to feed animals in Europe. The result will be pollution of water sources and soil, and health risks to the population in Mercosur countries and the EU. This goes against the EU Farm to Fork Strategy.

¹² <https://www.earthsight.org.uk/news/idm/brazil-corned-beef-jbs-uk-supermarkets-deforestation-amazon>

¹³ <https://www.asso-sherpa.org/amazon-indigenous-communities-and-international-ngos-sue-supermarket-giant-casino-over-deforestation-and-human-rights-violations>

Conclusion

There are enormous problems related to the industrial production of meat in Brazil and an EU Mercosur trade deal will only increase those problems, instead of reducing them. Industrial meat production is also problematic in Europe itself.

Friends of the Earth Europe believes that we need a radical transition in the current animal farming system and in the way we produce, distribute and consume our food. Food systems (including animal farming, animal product processing and distribution) must be reoriented to achieve key economic, social and environmental objectives instead of serving the interests of large companies in the food chain.

The corporate control of food and agricultural markets must be challenged. The concentration and specialisation of farming (including the expansion of factory farming) and shipping products around the globe needs to stop. Retailers, like the ones mentioned in this briefing, are part of the problem and Friends of the Earth Europe believes that they must stop selling products produced with harmful practices like slavery, unfair working conditions and deforestation, whether from Europe or from the Mercosur region.

Friends of the Earth Europe has two key demands to address problems in the Brazilian meat sector and the role of Europe and Mercosur:

- **Stop the EU-Mercosur deal:** We call on decision-makers in the EU and in Mercosur countries to drop the EU-Mercosur deal as it only accelerates already existing problems related to deforestation, human rights violations and climate change. Instead, they should engage in sincere cooperation that prioritises the common good and the interests of people and the environment.
- **Introduce mandatory environmental and human rights due diligence and accountability, including liability for harm caused and access to courts for victims:** The European Commission should introduce legislation to force companies, including financiers, to identify risks of harms in their global value chains and to take steps to prevent, mitigate and remedy those harms. It would prevent European retailers from selling products produced with harmful practices like slavery, unfair working conditions and deforestation. Such a law must also hold companies liable for harm caused by them and have strong enforcement mechanisms and sanctions. It should also prevent banks and financiers from

providing loans and other services to companies in this business¹⁴.

Factory farms are on the rise in many EU countries, driven especially by exports. They are associated with several harmful impacts to the environment and human rights, including:

- The massively increased production of soya in South America
- Deforestation
- Water pollution and air pollution
- The rise of global pandemics
- Rising greenhouse gas emissions
- Unsafe and cramped working conditions
- Domination of the European meat sector by a few large corporations
- Livelihoods of small-scale farmers at risk

Read our [full factory farming brief here](#).

¹⁴ There are two due diligence legislations the European Commission is proposing. The first is a mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence law for any companies. The second is a law to prevent products related to deforestation and forest degradation from being sold in the EU.

ANNEX: MYSTERY MEAT SHOPPING RESULTS

Results Mystery shopping

Country	Found Brazilian meat products in supermarkets?	Supermarket visited	Location	Brazilian Meat products	Online research	Brazilian Meat products	Link website
Austria	Yes only online.	Merkur (2), Interspar, Lidl, Hofer (Aldi Sud), Billa (Rewe Group)	Vienna	Online only.	Billa (Rewe Group)	Jacks Link Beef Jerky/ corned beef	https://www.billa.at/produkte/jack-links-beef-jerky-sweet-und-hot/00-672031 https://www.billa.at/produkte/price-corned-beef/00-696289
					Interspar	Jacks Link Beef Jerky	https://www.interspar.at/shop/lebensmittel/jack-links-jack-links-beef-jerky-sweet-hot/p/202000653509
Belgium	Yes in Carrefour and online	Carrefour	Brussels	Corned beef	Carrefour	Jacks Link Beef Jerky	https://drive.carrefour.eu/fr/Conserve/Conserve-de-viande/Jack-Link%27s-Beef-Jerky-Sweet-%26-Hot-25-g/p/05118604
France	Yes Online No group went to supermarkets				Casino	Jacks Link Beef Jerky	https://plus.casino.fr/products/MPX3886179/details
					Carrefour	Jacks Link Beef Jerky/ corned beef	https://drive.carrefour.eu/fr/Conserve/Conserve-de-viande/Jack-Link%27s-Beef-Jerky-Sweet-%26-Hot-25-g/p/05118604 https://drive.carrefour.eu/fr/Conserve/Conserve-de-viande/Target-Corned-Beef-340-g/p/04511014
Germany	Yes in Supermarkets and online	Edeka	Berlin	Jacks Link Beef Jerky/ Corned beef	Edeka	carpaccio beef/ fresh meat /beef filet	foodservice.de/lmiv/lmiv_detail.jsp?region=LSGV&id=00000000001401467 https://web.archive.org/web/20200827180526/http://edeka-foodservice.de/lmiv/lmiv_detail.jsp?region=NBST&id=000000003937092001 https://web.archive.org/web/20200827182040/http://edeka-
		Aldi	Berlin	Fresh meat			
		Rewe	Berlin	Jacks Link Beef Jerky	Rewe	Corned beef	https://shop.rewe.de/p/tulip-corned-beef-340g/8035239
UK	Yes online No visit to supermarkets				Tesco	Jacks Link Beef Jerky	https://www.tesco.com/groceries/en-GB/products/279602425
					Sainsbury's	Corned beef/ Jacks Link Beef Jerky	https://www.sainsburys.co.uk/gol-ui/product/sainsburys-corned-beef-200g https://www.sainsburys.co.uk/gol-ui/Product/jack-links-original-beef-jerky-25g
Hungary	Yes in supermarkets	Metro	Budapest	Frozen & Chilled Beef, frozen chicken livers,			
		Steakshop		Bonless Beef			
Netherlands	Yes online and in supermarkets	Albert Heijn	Amsterdam/ Utrecht	Corned Beef/Jacks Link Beef Jerky	Albert Heijn	Corned beef/ Jacks Link Beef Jerky	https://www.ah.nl/producten/product/wi203341/ah-corned-beef https://www.ah.nl/producten/product/wi445077/jack-links-s-beef-jerky-original
		Vormar		Amsterdam	Corned Beef	Jumbo	Jacks Link Beef Jerky
Slovenia	Yes only online.	Lidl, Hofer (Aldi) and Spar	Vrhnika		Spar	Jacks Link Beef Jerky	https://www.spar.si/iskanje?q=beef+jerky&category=products

Friends of the Earth Europe Member Groups

Austria — **GLOBAL 2000**

Belgium (Wallonia & Brussels) — **Les Amis de la Terre**

Belgium (Flanders & Brussels) — **Climaxi**

Bosnia & Herzegovina — **Centar za životnu sredinu**

Bulgaria — **Za Zemiata**

Croatia — **Zelena Akcija**

Cyprus — **Friends of the Earth**

Czech Republic — **Hnutí Duha**

Denmark — **NOAH**

England, Wales & Northern Ireland — **Friends of the Earth**

Estonia — **Eesti Roheline Liikumine**

Finland — **Maan Ystävät Ry**

France — **Les Amis de la Terre**

Georgia — **Sakhartvelos Mtsvaneta Modzraoba**

Germany — **Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (BUND)**

Hungary — **Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége**

Ireland — **Friends of the Earth**

Latvia — **Latvijas Zemes Draugi**

Lithuania — **Lietuvos Zaliuju Judėjimas**

Luxembourg — **Mouvement Ecologique**

Macedonia — **Dvizhenje na Ekologistite na Makedonija**

Malta — **Friends of the Earth Malta**

The Netherlands — **Milieudefensie**

Norway Norges — **Naturvernforbund**

Poland — **Polski Klub Ekologiczny**

Russia — **Russian Social Ecological Union**

Scotland — **Friends of the Earth Scotland**

Slovakia — **Priatelja Zeme**

Slovenia — **Focus Association for Sustainable Development**

Spain — **Amigos de la Tierra**

Sweden — **Jordens Vänner**

Switzerland — **Pro Natura**



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Friends of the Earth Europe campaigns the protection of the environment, unites more than 30 national organisations with thousands of local groups and is part of the world's largest grassroots environmental network, Friends of the Earth International