

AGRIBUSINESS LOBBY IN THE CLIMATE NEGOTIATIONS SOUTH AMERICAN GM SOY CLOSE TO GET CARBON CREDITS

September 2009

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As the UN Climate Change Conference 2009 (COP15) gets closer, a new agreement has to be signed for the period after 2012. It is becoming clear how agribusiness attempts to gain profits from the massive carbon credits market. Under the term “Conservation Agriculture”, Monsanto and other biotech allies have penetrated the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) aiming to get carbon credits for agribusiness. A voluntary ‘responsible’ label for Roundup Ready soy sponsored by World Wild Life Fund (WWF), and a newly approved Clean Development Mechanisms (CDM) methodology are important steps for Agribusiness to get access to this three billion dollar business.

Proposals to include agriculture in carbon offsetting focus on changes in tillage practices and reductions in methane and nitrous oxide emissions. All these practices are included in the concept of “Conservation Agriculture”, which is based on three principles: minimal soil disturbance, permanent soil cover and crop rotations¹. However, in the name of Conservation Agriculture and with the explicit consent of FAO and UNFCCC, very different agricultural methods are included. Under this label a range of systems from biological agriculture to No-till GM industrial agriculture can be labelled as sustainable and so receive carbon credits.

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No-till is an agricultural technique that requires no ploughing or digging of the soil. When sowing, seeds are drilled into the soil. In general, No-till is considered a conservation practice that increases levels of soil organic matter and reduces soil erosion, but in RR soy industrial monocultures it part of this technique is used in conjunction with very harmful environmental practices.

In practice, Carbon credits for No-till could mean a massive economic support for Genetically Modified (GM) soy monocultures in South and North America and a promotion of this agribusiness model in other Southern Hemisphere regions.



This is what No-till looks like in Brazil. A good example of modern agriculture with No-till practice, is this sustainable? -Source: 4th World Congress on Conservation Agriculture-presentation Eng Agr Ivo Mello CAAPAS

GM soy monocultures are a production model which is not sustainable in any way. In South America, soy production of this kind is one of the main drivers of deforestation, land use change, biodiversity destruction and

1 <http://www.fao.org/ag/ca/>

human rights violations². Moreover, these monocultures sustain the industrial feed industry which is a main cause of climate change as well. To label these agricultural production models as “sustainable” only because they involve less ploughing (no tillage or No-till) means falling into a trap of absurdly reductionism and blindness.

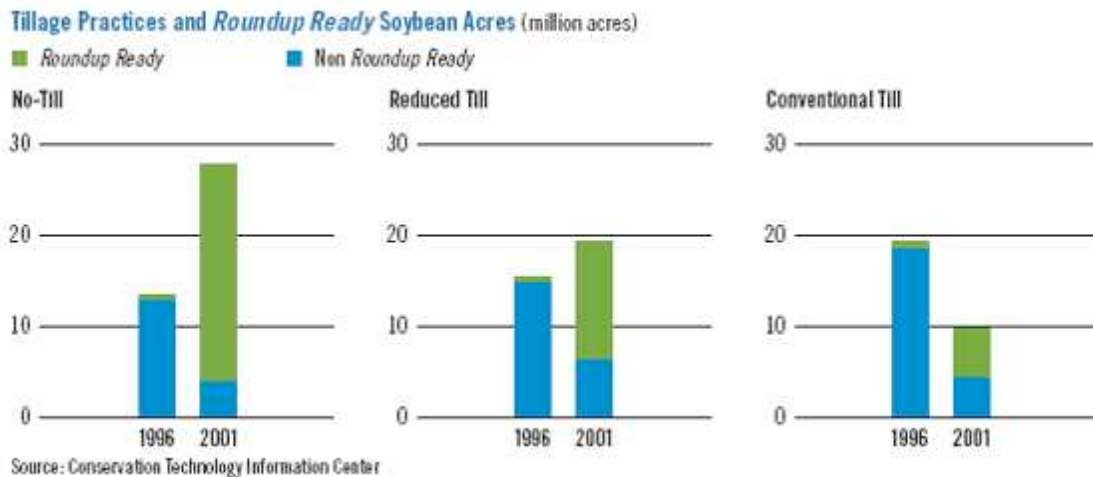
The report “Agriculture and Climate Change: Real Problems, False Solutions” presented in June 2009 reveals the main agriculture-related proposals in the negotiations for a post -2012 climate agreement. It provides an informative panorama on how current and proposed agricultural practices for the post Kyoto agreements really impact on climate change³. However, in this article we will focus specifically on some cases related to soy monocultures.

GM SOY: CHEMICAL WEED CONTROL AND ‘NO-TILL’

In South America 41 million hectares of soybean are being cultivated. A constantly escalating proportion of this crop uses the genetically modified seed, Roundup Ready (RR) patented by Monsanto. Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay currently rank among the first seven countries cultivating GM crops in the world.⁴

Today, the main system to produce RR soybean uses the No-till technique. This technique combined with the transgenic herbicide tolerance trait has made possible to expand and intensify the production by reducing labour costs and extend it to soils on which it was not possible to produce on before.

For agribusiness, the combination of RR soybean and No-till is an economical success. When glyphosate is sprayed on soy monoculture, all plants die except the GM soy, which significantly simplifies the job of weed control. Mechanical weeding (with the use of ploughs) is substituted by chemical weeding. No-till makes herbicide use indispensable for the weeding; in this sense the best way to name it would be ‘Chemical No-till’. The combination of RR soy monocultures and No-till has led to an overall exponential increase of pesticide use and millions of dollars of profit for seed and chemical companies. The production scale has increased to monocultures of thousands of hectares, with a minimal labour requirement of only 2 people per 1000 hectares, basing all pest management on pesticide spraying machines and airplanes.



Source:http://www.monsanto.com/responsibility/our_pledge/healthier_environment/carbon_sequestration.asp

The expansion of RR soybean crops is causing massive contamination because of the intensive pesticide use. This leads not only to biodiversity loss, but in countries like Argentina and Paraguay, also people are being exposed to live under “chemical war” conditions. Studies in Argentina and Paraguay demonstrate higher malformations rates in areas of soy production⁵.

2 More to read in www.lasojamata.org and www.grr.org.ar
 3 <http://www.econexus.info/pdf/agriculture-climate-change-june-2009.pdf>
 4 James, 2007. Global Status of Commercialized Biotech/GM Crops: 2007. ISAAA
 5 To read more www.lasojamata.org

AGRIBUSINESS LOBBY TO CLASSIFY NO-TILL

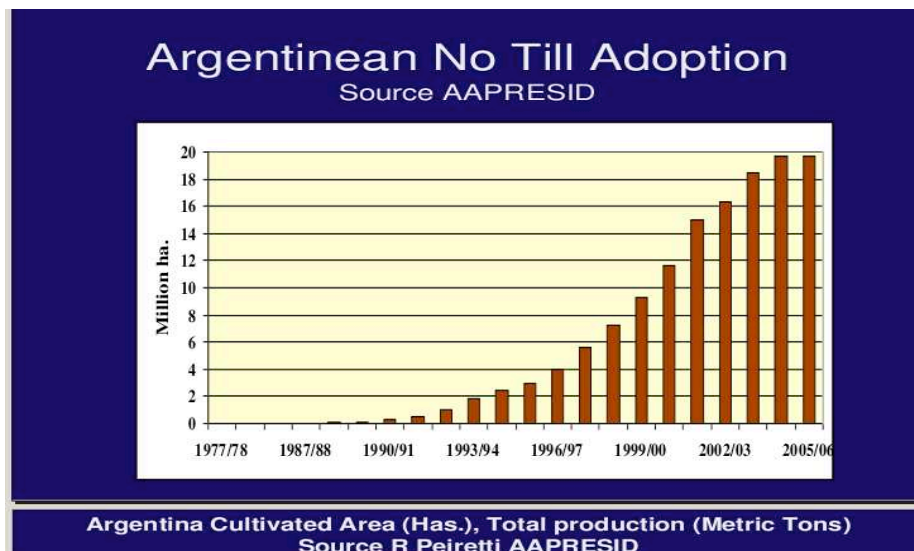
According to the recent GRR's communiqué "Carbon Credits for No-till Farming systems and Soy monocultures", AAPRESID, the Argentinean organisation of No-till farmers, brought up the possibility to include No-till under the CDM in a meeting that took place in 2005 between the environmental minister, Atilio Savino, the chief of the Argentinean CDM Office of CDM, Hernan Carlino, and the main agribusiness and soy producer representatives.⁶

AAPRESID is a major platform of agribusiness and was founded in 1998 under the supervision of Monsanto.⁷ Other members are BASF, Syngenta, Bayer, and Dow and many other corporations.⁸

AAPRESID's lobby for climate subsidises is not surprising, since currently in Argentina, nearly 17 million hectares are cultivated with GM soy using No-till, representing 20% of the total No-till acreage in the world. Therefore Argentina plays a key role in the international arena where biotech and agribusiness issues are concerned.

Lorenzatti, general coordinator of AAPRESID began to develop the idea of environmental certification based on No-till agriculture systems. Since then, AAPRESID has been intensively promoting this project in FAO related events, such as the International Congress of Conservation Agriculture presenting the "No-till miracle of Argentina" without mentioning either soybean, GMOs, pesticides nor the whole range of social and environmental impacts soy monocultures had caused in the region.⁹ Under Lorenzatti's leadership in 2008, AAPRESID officially launched the new program Certified Agriculture (AC), which according to them is designed "to improve the business management and to optimize the resources-use efficiency".¹⁰ The program is a protocol for Certified Agriculture (AC) based on a scheme of Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs)¹¹. The protocol is the first step of a series of Environmental Services that soy farmers can participate in. At the moment this project has an Argentinean focus but aims to be a global service provider. Through the AC label, AAPRESID is developing a certification enterprise that in the future can be qualified as the national supervisor for CDM.

AAPRESID is strongly lobbying at international levels with its Certified Agriculture enterprise, such as in the EU conference on "Climate change – can soil make a difference?". This conference took place in Brussels in June 2008 and was organized by Mr Stavros Dimas (Commissioner for the Environment, European Commission) and Mr Luc Gnacadja (Executive Secretary of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification).¹²



Source: 4th World Congress on Conservation Agriculture- presentation Eng Agr Ivo Mello –

6 GRR.2009. Carbon credits for No-till Farming systems and soy monocultures. www.grr.org.ar

7 www.grr.org.ar

8 <http://www.aapresid.org.ar/empresas.asp>

9 <http://www.fao.org/ag/ca/9.html>

10 http://www.ac.org.ar/nota_e.asp?did=13640

11 www.ac.org.ar

12 Report on the conference. Climate change – can soil make a difference? Brussels, Thursday 12 June 2008

In 2007, Carlino became chairman of the CDM Executive Board, until 2008¹³. He did not forget the guidelines of AAPRESID and it was during the COP13-conference in Bali that carbon credits for No-till practices were mentioned for the first time.¹⁴ Furthermore, during his mandate in 2007, the first small scale CDM methodology project was approved that involved soy production. The project consisted of the inoculation of soybean seeds with nitrogen fixing bacteria, in order to decrease the use of fertilizers. The project was developed by Becker Underwood.¹⁵ The first steps were taken towards certifying soy monocultures.

Inoculation means to artificially insert Rhizobia bacteria into the seed. Rhizobia are soil bacteria that fix atmospheric nitrogen after becoming established inside root nodules of legumes (Fabaceae). In this way, legumes crops enrich the soil after the harvest, thus significant amounts of nitrogen remain in the soil available for future crops. Since soybean is not a native plant species in South America, seeds have to be artificially treated with this bacterium in order to fix nitrogen. Nitrogen is the most commonly deficient nutrient in many soils) around the world and it is usually supplied through fertilizers. Fertiliser use however has severe environmental concerns.

Also in 2007, Monsanto joined the Chicago Climate Exchange (CCX), North America's only voluntary, legally binding greenhouse gas emissions reduction, registry, and trading program. According to Carbon Trade Watch, this company is one of the most influential trading exchanges worldwide. CCX has been developed by 28 large companies, including Ford, DuPont and BP Amoco.¹⁶ Monsanto does not only want to gain carbon credits by entering the market, its main goal is to develop "products that help farmers practice conservation tillage and increase yields to meet growing food and fuel needs, while they maintain or even improve the environment."¹⁷

For this aim, in 2008 Monsanto established a global seed treatment platform, entering into separate agreements with Becker Underwood and Plant Health Care Inc., for delivering proprietary seed treatments for corn, soybeans and cotton. "Monsanto plans to begin offering seed treatments as early as the 2009 season and treat all Roundup Ready 2 Yield soybeans with this biological nitrogen fixing bacteria. The company is also working to have a seed treatment solution for its Deltapine cotton and for Smart Stax corn in the next years."¹⁸

The same year in October, FAO and the Conservation Technology Information Centre (CTIC) with technical the support of the UNFCCC organized a Conservation Agriculture Carbon Offset Consultation in the US. The discussion was about the integration of agricultural activities in carbon market. CTIC is an agriculture research centre with board members consisting of corporate actors from Monsanto, John Deere, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The Fertilizer Institute, Syngenta and CropLife America^{19,20}.

In the concluding report of the consultation, written by Theodor Friedrich, FAO and Karen Scanlon, CTIC, there is a indirect recognition of the industrial commodity agriculture in the sentence "As more and more people depend on fewer farmers it is imperative that each farm not only contribute to the world's supply of food, feed, fibre and fuel but also play a critical role in addressing climate change", despite that there is no mention to biotechnology. The document ends with a call to "farmer organizations, environmental NGOs, international development banks and country governments, to "mobilize their resources in order to influence the UNFCCC to include conservation agriculture as viable option for climate change mitigation qualifying for carbon market mechanisms in the post Kyoto negotiations".²¹

In 2008 US congress presented a new Climate Bill that is seen as a "the trigger for the next spurt of investment to take the market to next level" according to a Carbon market analyst. The new Climate bill opens the door for

13 <http://cdm.unfccc.int/EB/025/eb25annagan3.pdf>

14 GRR communiqué as in 5.

15 [PROJECT DESIGN DOCUMENT FORM \(CDM-SSC-PDD\) - Version 03. CLEAN DEVELOPMENT MECHANISM. PROJECT DESIGN DOCUMENT FORM \(CDM-SSC-PDD\). Version 03 - in effect as of: 22 December 200. http://cdm.unfccc.int/UserManagement/FileStorage/YK33E8WHQMT2I92O2ZIMONSKS0EOG6](http://cdm.unfccc.int/UserManagement/FileStorage/YK33E8WHQMT2I92O2ZIMONSKS0EOG6)

16 <http://www.carbontradewatch.org/pubs/skyeng.pdf>

17 http://www.monsanto.com/responsibility/our_pledge/healthier_environment/carbon_sequestration.asp

18 <http://seedquest.com/News/releases/2008/february/21809.htm>

19 http://www.conservationinformation.org/?action=about_aboutctic_board

20 <http://www.econexus.info/pdf/agriculture-climate-change-june-2009.pdf>

21 Managing Soil Carbon to Mitigate Climate Change: A Sound Investment in Ecosystem Services. A Framework for Action Contacts: Theodor Friedrich, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Karen Scanlon, Conservation Technology Information Centre.

agriculture offsets. The new advantage seems to be that the regulatory body becomes the US Department of Agriculture instead of the traditional Environmental Protection Agency EPA.²² If US in the COP15 condition to sign the agreements post 2012 the inclusion of Agriculture for Carbon Offset and follow the US model, this step would mean an economical lifejacket for agribusiness after the financial crisis. As GRR mentions in its communiqué it is expected that the “financial speculation, which is currently in crisis following the sub-prime mortgage debacle, will be recycled through the Carbon Credits and the new market opportunities that they will offer. “

THE FIRST CDM METHODOLOGY – A GIFT TO BECKER AND MONSANTO

In July 2009, UNFCCC finally approved the first agricultural methodology for CDM. This project eliminates the use of fertilizer to legume on a crop rotation between legumes and grass. The agricultural methodology goes back to the nitrogen-fixing technology patented by Becker. The methodology was developed by Amson Technology LC, a greenhouse-gas-reduction and sustainability consulting firm, Becker Underwood Inc. and Perspectives GmbH, a Point Carbon company, a high-quality greenhouse gas reduction market solutions provider.²³ A draft document of the methodology shows that the whole document is oriented to soybean and maize rotation, based on the methodology developed previously in Beckers project in Brazil. GRR communiqué questions the innovative character of this methodology: “What would GM soy producers in Argentina have to do, in the near future, to supplement their already huge profits with Carbon Credits? Surprisingly, not much more than they have done for the past 13 years... ”Will No-till be next CDM methodology approved?

One month later, Monsanto signed an agreement in Argentina with AAPRESID joining the AC, Certified Agriculture System. According to Bernardo Calvo, President of Monsanto's Latin American branch, this step is part of the company's Sustainable Production Commitment for 2030 where they aim to double the production yield and simultaneously decrease the use of natural resources.²⁴

GREENWASH PLATFORMS

The Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS) is a broad coalition of Industry and big Conservation Agencies such as World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) that have since 2004 worked on developing a series of sustainable criteria for intensive soy monoculture production in South America.²⁵ The RTRS criteria do not exclude GMOs, which is not surprising since Monsanto and Syngenta joined the Round Table in February 2009.²⁶ In recent years, WWF has also founded the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO), Better Sugarcane Initiative (BSI) and Round Table on Sustainable Biofuels (RTSB). WWF is playing a key role facilitating the biggest agribusiness corporations to play the sustainable and social responsible role and greenwash the global commodity production. These initiatives are also functioning to distract, bias and weaken international political agreements. The critics of the RTRS corporative approach are widespread amongst social movements and ecologist organisations in South America. Therefore none of these groups participate in the RTRS.²⁷

In the beginning of 2009, the Campinas declaration after the 4th conference of the RTRS, mentioned as a primary goal the reduction of the Green House Gases (GHGs). The sustainable criteria include directives about farm carbon balance, related to fossil fuel use and soil quality (considering conservation agriculture, crop rotation and balanced fertilization)²⁸. The criteria of the RTRS have served as a framework for the criteria of AAPRESID's Certified Agriculture. AAPRESID is also a member of RTRS.

In June 2009, a press release from the Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS) mentions for the first time carbon credits related to forests and soil protection. “The challenge now is to find mechanisms to reward producers who protect forests and soil by allowing them to sell carbon along with their soy,” says Jason Clay, an expert on soy agriculture who leads World Wildlife Fund's (WWF's) work with international markets. He also states “This is a win-win-win situation. Forests and soil are protected, producers have an additional source of

22 <http://www.reuters.com/article/GCA-GreenBusiness/idUSTRE56C2WG20090713?pageNumber=2&virtualBrandChannel=0>

23 <http://www.environmentalleader.com/2009/07/27/un-approves-ag-carbon-offset-methodology-to-cut-co2-emissions/>

24 http://www.monsanto.com.ar/h/prensa_41.html, <http://www.monsanto.es/noticias-y-recursos/comunicados-de-prensa/monsanto-assume-un-compromiso-en-tres-puntos>

25 www.responsiblesoy.org

26 <http://www.gmwatch.org/latest-listing/1-news-items/10590-monsanto-and-syngenta-join-wwf-on-rtrs?format=pdf>

27 Read about the opposition to RTRS in www.lasojamata and <http://www.grr.org.ar/iguazu/>

28 www.rtrs.org

income, and retailers and brands can now buy responsible soy as a way to reduce their carbon footprint. Preliminary calculations suggest that producers in forest areas can net more income selling carbon than soy. This fundamentally changes soy and makes it a new kind of commodity."²⁹ In previous years Clay has been promoting the "Integrated Crop x livestock rotation with Zero tillage" in the Amazon region as a way to decrease deforestation, but recently he switched and started to speak about carbon credits.

Finally, the biotech lobby is getting ready for Copenhagen and they seem to have a close agenda with the big Conservation NGOs. In a recent document of the US biotech lobby association BIO, a surprising plan is to seek collaboration with WWF. Other points are that in the new climate treaty, the threats are intellectual property issues. Meanwhile advantages can be the potential for grants and funding to biotechnology providers and government incentives for international biotechnology deployment. Unsurprisingly, recommendations include close coordination with the United States and friendly international governments.

Before COP15, there is much more to research and reveal about the agribusiness race to access the carbon credit market. However, it is urgent that a critical debate begins amongst organisations and movements so that a clear, strict and powerful message and action strategy comes out against this agribusiness "climate change offensive". At the moment, social movements slogans "small scale sustainable farming cool down the earth" might not be enough to counteract the massive advance of the agroindustrial machinery into the climate change arena. It is necessary to identify and denounce the corporate lobby actors such as Monsanto and other biotech lobby. But it is also important to highlight and strengthen the rejection of the role that big Conservationist NGOs such as WWF, World Wildlife Fund and TNC, The Nature Conservancy and IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature are playing in these multi stake holders process for Corporate Social Responsibility.

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²⁹ <http://eponline.com/articles/2009/06/12/soy-producers-will-pilot-conservation-standards.aspx>