



Roundtable on Responsible Soya - The Certifying smoke screen (Summary)

22 May 2012

Responsible: "Based on or characterized by good judgment or sound thinking"

The Roundtable on Responsible Soya (RTRS) Annual Conference will be held at the Park Inn Heathrow Hotel on 23 and 24 May 2011.

The RTRS is a voluntary certification scheme established in May 2004 and formally launched in 2006 as the RTRS Association. Members include food and agribusiness giants like Cargill and Monsanto, and supermarkets like Sainsbury's, but also some NGOs including the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

The first ten audit reports have now been published online. GM Freeze, Friends of the Earth and Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO Publishing) [1] have now scrutinised these reports, which confirm the RTRS has not brought a single benefit for the environment, for small farmers in soya areas or for consumers. For instance:

- All soy plantations are existing plantations (ie, already deforested).
- Nothing stops the soya producers from continuing to expand and deforest elsewhere.
- Pesticide use is not reduced, and no direct evidence (by sampling and testing) is provided to demonstrate that banned pesticides are not used.
- Small charity gestures are made as evidence of "good community relations", while the reports show that Roundup and other pesticide spraying occurs as close as 30 metres from people's homes.
- Sometimes "third party" interviewees are selected by the soya producers themselves, and usually by the auditor, but there is no information how the selection takes place.

Fourteen companies in four countries have so far been certified, amounting to 0.164% of global soya production. One company has only certified part of its operation because the rest would not meet even the lax RTRS standards, which have been diluted over time to try and encourage wider participation.

The RTRS criteria were flawed to begin with. For instance even in the crucial area of deforestation the baseline date of May 2009 means areas felled in the last 5 years can be certified as "responsible", and RTRS standards still allow some forest destruction provided certain criteria are met.

The RTRS also certifies GM Roundup Ready soya as "responsible", despite overwhelming evidence that relying on glyphosate for weed control is unsustainable due to the development of weed resistance and the growing evidence of its toxicity to people and wildlife. Weed resistance is

leading to an escalation in the use of glyphosate and other weedkillers, meaning any goals for reducing pesticide usage are impossible to meet. Clear pesticide reduction targets are not set by the RTRS.

Hard evidence that soya producers are communicating with neighbouring farmers over crucial issues such as land rights, or that measures are taken to prevent pesticide drift into populated areas, is rarely provided by the published RTRS audit reports.

Evidence of improved working conditions on RTRS farms is not consistently provided by the reports, nor is training for use of pesticides, yet all who apply are certified.

Human Rights abuses continue in the soya belt. A local activist in the Peasant Farmer's Movement was murdered in 2011 following disputes over land grabbing for soya expansion.

RTRS member companies Monsanto and the Dutch seed company Nidera have been implicated in allegations of exploitation of farm workers.

The main RTRS market is Europe, where there is growing concern about the impact of intensive soya production on forests, people and the environment. The RTRS approach to traceability includes "mass balance", whereby soya loads can be accredited as meeting the RTRS criteria despite containing unspecified amounts of non-certified soya. Such a system will leave consumers completely in the dark, is unreliable and dishonest.

A growing reliance on RTRS soya by EU animal feed companies to support unsustainable forms of intensive livestock and poultry production cannot be described as being "based on or characterized by good judgment or sound thinking". Certification of the status quo is not the answer. Strong national regulation and fearless enforcement is.

UK RTRS members include ASDA, Greenergy, Marks & Spencer, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, The Co-operative Group, Unilever and Waitrose.