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Agribusiness in transition: Bridging forest conservation initiatives and agricultural productivity in the Gran Chaco, Cerrado and Amazon

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Abstract

Agribusiness has traditionally seen forests as barriers to agricultural expansion, often converting them into agricultural land to boost production, without fully recognising the critical role forests play in agricultural productivity. This mindset, however, has led to increased environmental, regulatory, and reputational risks for the companies.

In response to these evolving dynamics, companies are implementing a range of initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable forest management within their production landscapes. These initiatives include reducing deforestation by tracing suppliers and the origin of raw materials, adopting regenerative agricultural practices to improve existing agricultural land, and launching reforestation projects to counteract deforestation. Yet, despite growing corporate sustainability efforts, scientific research in forestry and social sciences continues to focus on the detrimental socio-ecological effects of agribusiness on forest landscapes, with little emphasis on studying these forest governance initiatives aiming for a more sustainable production.

This study aims to fill that gap by conducting a detailed content analysis of sustainability reports from multinational agribusiness enterprises operating in Argentina’s Gran Chaco, as well as in Brazil’s Cerrado and Amazon, three Latin American deforestation hotspots. The study specifically examines the soy and beef sectors to understand their approach to forest governance. The analysis involves mapping and interpreting a) specific commitments each company has made towards forest governance b) the initiatives they have undertaken to meet these commitments c) the methods and key actors involved in implementing these initiatives, and d) the resulting synergies and trade-offs related to sustainable development in agricultural landscapes.

By offering insights into corporate forest governance strategies, this study offers a fresh perspective on the role agribusinesses play in tackling environmental and social challenges. It also contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how these strategies might pave the way for more sustainable practices within the agricultural sector.

Keywords: Deforestation, forest governance, forest-risk commodities, land use change, sustainability initiatives