
[Brasil: So, Mr. Liedeker, is Aracruz controversial?](#)

In 2003, Brazil's Aracruz Cellulose paid Klabin US\$610 million to buy its Riocell pulp operations in Rio Grande do Sul. Along with a 400,000 tonnes a year pulp mill and 40,000 hectares of eucalyptus plantations came a certificate from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), saying that the plantations were well managed.

This certificate is giving Heiko Liedeker, FSC's Executive Director, a headache. Put simply, the problem is that Aracruz is one of the most controversial pulp companies in the world. The company's plantations in Espírito Santo are on land belonging to the Tupinikim and Guarani Indigenous Peoples. Aracruz is carrying out research into genetically engineered trees. Treatment of workers in Aracruz's plantations is appalling. The plantations have dried up streams and watercourses. And in January 2006, Aracruz was involved in a violent police action to evict people from two villages that the Tupinikim and Guarani had rebuilt on land reclaimed from Aracruz.

In May 2006, Heiko Liedeker met two Brazilians from Espírito Santo at FSC's international secretariat in Bonn. Paulo de Oliveira, a Tupinikim from Caieira Velha village, and Wera Kwaray, a Guarani from Boa Esperança village were in Europe to publicise the impacts of Aracruz on their livelihoods, culture, forests and land. The German NGOs Urgewald and Robin Wood organised and sent representatives to the meeting, Geertje van der Pas from the Brazilian NGO CIMI translated, and I took part in the meeting.

Paulo de Oliveira described how in the 1970s Aracruz cleared the Atlantic forest and then burned it. "The animals disappeared," de Oliveira said. "Before Aracruz came, we could hunt and find food." He explained how FUNAI, the government department for Indigenous issues in Brazil, had produced a series of reports (the most recent published earlier this year) which recognised the Indigenous Peoples' rights to their land in Espírito Santo. He explained how the Tupinikim and Guarani had self-demarcated their land. He described how the police had broken his arm during the eviction in January 2006, and how he had been imprisoned in Aracruz's Guest House. "Why did the police use this guest house when there is a proper police station?" he asked.

"The first question is about Aracruz being certified," Liedeker responded. "Aracruz is not certified. Just one plantation is certified." Aracruz holds a certificate for its operations in Rio Grande Do Sul, he explained, not for its operations in Espírito Santo.

Wera Kwaray pointed out that two months ago about 2,000 women from Via Campesina had occupied an Aracruz tree nursery in Rio Grande do Sul. The demonstration was to "denounce the social and environmental impact of the growing green desert created by eucalyptus monocultures", according to Via Campesina. "If Aracruz hasn't done anything wrong in the south, why did this happen?" Kwaray asked. "It is a sign that something is wrong."

Hubert de Bonafos, FSC's Accreditation Officer, explained that in December 2004, FSC had carried out its annual audit of SmartWood by looking at the certification at Riocell. "As a result", he said, "FSC identified some shortcomings in a report to SmartWood." FSC gave SmartWood a year to sort

out the problems. Even when SmartWood failed to meet this generous deadline, FSC did not take any public action.

Liedeker promised that FSC's report about Aracruz and SmartWood would be "made public very soon". Based on this report, Liedeker will decide whether to recommend that the FSC Board takes any action, such as withdrawing the Aracruz certificate or penalising SmartWood.

According to FSC's rules, in order to be eligible for an FSC certificate, companies have to "demonstrate a long-term commitment to adhere to the FSC Principles and Criteria." That includes recognising and respecting the "legal and customary rights of indigenous peoples to own, use and manage their lands, territories, and resources." Since it started operations in Espírito Santo in the late 1960s Aracruz has been in breach of this principle. According to FSC's own rules, therefore, the Aracruz certificate should be withdrawn.

In February 2006, I wrote to Liedeker to ask him some questions about Aracruz's FSC certificate. Among my questions was whether FSC considered Aracruz to be controversial. Liedeker evaded the question, by explaining that FSC does not declare companies either controversial or non-controversial. His reply included the following extraordinary statement: "FSC reserves all rights to this document. This document or any part thereof may only be reproduced together with the original questions and only with written permission of FSC."

During the meeting in Bonn, Peter Gerhardt of Robin Wood and Lydia Bartz of Urgewald asked Liedeker several times whether Aracruz was controversial. Again, Liedeker evaded the questions. Clearly, Liedeker could not tell Paulo de Oliveira and Wera Kwaray that Aracruz is not controversial. But if he acknowledged that Aracruz is controversial he would also have to admit that he should have long ago insisted that the certificate be withdrawn.

By partially certifying Aracruz, FSC is encouraging more sales of Aracruz products. "The more you buy products from Aracruz, the bigger this company will become," an inhabitant of Espírito Santo says in a video clip on Robin Wood's website. "The more products that are bought, the more we must suffer." By not withdrawing Aracruz's certificate, FSC is making things worse for local people.

"I promise that we are taking this very seriously. We are already on the road," Liedeker told us. But three years have passed since Aracruz bought its FSC certificate. FSC must withdraw the certificate immediately.

By Chris Lang, e-mail: <http://chrislang.org> , www.chrislang.blogspot.com