
[FSC: Stop certifying monoculture tree plantations!](#)

Asia Pulp and Paper is probably the most controversial paper company in the world. It has destroyed vast areas of forest in Sumatra and replaced hundreds of thousands of hectares with monoculture plantations. In December 2007, the Forest Stewardship Council announced its "dissociation" from APP after the company starting using the FSC logo. FSC issued a statement saying that it has "a duty to protect the good will and integrity associated with its name and logo for consumers and for our trusted partners and members." At last, it appeared, FSC had noticed it is greenwashing environmentally and socially destructive companies. Unfortunately, the dissociation from APP remains a one-off.

FSC's goal is "to promote environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests." FSC should not certify industrial tree plantations, for the simple reason that they are not forests. FSC should no more certify plantations that it should certify fields of lettuce.

Industrial tree plantations are neither environmentally responsible nor socially beneficial. They are often only economically viable as a result of generous government subsidies.

Veracel is perhaps the most egregious example of the many companies that should never have been certified by FSC. Since the company established its monoculture eucalyptus plantations in the south of Bahia state in Brazil, rivers, streams and springs have dried up. As the company's plantations have expanded the area of land planted to food crops has decreased. Rural people have lost work and moved to cities, many living in overcrowded and dangerous favelas.

In July 2008, The Brazilian Federal court fined Veracel for clearing Atlantic rainforest. The court ordered Veracel to replace its eucalyptus plantations with native trees. Veracel's certificate remains in place.

Last year, armed guards employed by another FSC-certified plantation company, Vallourec & Mannesmann (V&M), shot and killed Antonio Joaquim dos Santos in front of his 16 year-old daughter. He was collecting firewood. A year before the shooting, local people submitted a complaint, pointing out that the replacement of the native savanna (cerrado) with V&M's monocultures has left the community without access to firewood and fruits. V&M's response was to increase the pressure on the community.

The killing came as no surprise to many people. "The threat to workers and people here is great," a villager told journalist and activist Heidi Bachram, in 2006. "Shots have been fired on people by the armed guards. They feel prisoners within their own lands."

A few weeks after the murder of Antonio Joaquim dos Santos, V&M announced its "voluntary decision to leave FSC".

In Uruguay, WRM has documented the near-slave labour conditions in FSC-certified plantations.

FYMNSA, one of the FSC-certified companies, "was violating labour rights", said Jose Bautista, the head of a local workers union. "It should ever have been certified," he added.

Eufores, another FSC-certified company, was recently caught clearing 80 hectares of strictly protected forest in Uruguay. The company is a subsidiary of the Spanish company ENCE. In June 2008, another ENCE subsidiary, NORFOR, saw its FSC certificate withdrawn in Spain. Among the problems that NGOs pointed out were indiscriminate use of herbicides, damage to the soil, increase in erosion, clearcuts of more than 20 hectares and the use of exotic species.

In Ireland, Coillte has about 450,000 hectares of pesticide-laden monoculture plantations. After a 2007 audit, the body which checks that FSC standards are upheld, Accreditation Services International (ASI), found that "non-compliance with relevant FSC Criterion is likely to be ongoing for a few years". Nevertheless, Coillte remains FSC-certified.

More than 1.6 million hectares of industrial tree plantations are certified in South Africa. As Philip Owen of the South African NGO Geosphere points out, "Plantation management operations destroy grassland's multiple products and services," thereby undermining economic viability and a wide range of environmental and social benefits."

FSC is well aware of the problems with the certification of plantations. It has been working on a "Plantations Review" since the 2002 FSC General Assembly. At the time, FSC had certified 3.3 million hectares of plantations. The figure is now 8.6 million hectares. The plantations review has made no difference whatsoever to the way FSC certificates are issued.

In fact, FSC actively promotes industrial tree plantations, by aiming to increase sales of FSC-labelled paper. FSC's "Global Paper Forum" brings several hundred industry representatives together to find "Market opportunities for FSC-labelled paper". This year's Forum was sponsored by Mondi and Suzano among others. FSC's General Assembly, which will take place in South Africa in November, is sponsored by Mondi, Tembec and Sveaskog.

FSC urgently needs to distance itself from the industry it is certifying. Instead it is getting closer. As it does so, the FSC logo becomes little more than corporate greenwash.

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