



Tropical Deforestation: The Threat to Maine Farms and Jobs

Illegal overseas agriculture and logging operations are rapidly cutting down the world's rainforests for cheap land and timber. This deforestation is allowing them to flood the market with artificially cheap commodities, driving down prices, and undermining Maine exports.

Maine farmers and landowners know the importance of being good stewards – not just for the sake of our natural resources, but for the improved productivity of the land. Thanks to these values and decades of good management, U.S. agriculture is the most productive in the world and U.S. forests are growing and expanding.

Unfortunately, these principles aren't shared by many of our competitors around the world. Agriculture and logging operations in tropical countries like Brazil and Indonesia are cutting down their forests at the alarming rate of 30 million acres a year, or one football field every second. This burning sends more carbon pollution into the atmosphere than all the world's cars, trucks, and planes *combined*.

Saving Rainforests: Not Just a Tree-Huggers Cause

- After slashing and burning these natural resources for fast cash infusions, the cleared land is used to expand production of cheap beef, soybeans, wood, vegetable oil and other products, driving down commodity prices and undercutting responsibly and sustainably produced Maine goods.

- Because rainforest land is generally nutrient poor and unsuitable to farming, most tropical agriculture operations exhaust the land within just a few years. Without incentives to invest in improved fertility, they just burn additional forest, creating a vicious cycle of deforestation.

- This deforestation allows tropical countries to inundate the market, reducing prices of major commodities like beef, vegetable oil and timber by up to nine percent or more, costing Maine producers up to \$425 million by 2030. For all

these reasons, major agriculture and forest groups like the National Farmers Union and the American Forest and Paper Association support protecting tropical forests.

We Can Level the Playing Field

We have an opportunity to correct this injustice and make sure Maine farmers and landowners have a fair chance to compete: the energy and climate legislation before Congress must include strong provisions to dramatically reduce deforestation.

- By valuing tropical forests for the carbon they store and cracking down on illegal logging, the legislation would end the slash and burn practices that are giving overseas operations an unfair advantage over Maine producers, while protecting the environment for future generations.

- The legislation will help bring global agriculture and forestry up to U.S. standards and create millions of good paying jobs in conservation for people in rainforest nations – work that doesn't compete with Americans.

- At the same time, protecting rainforests will reduce concerns about indirect land use impacts of growing biofuels – bringing more stability to U.S. commodity markets and new prosperity to America's farmers.

By protecting tropical forests today, we can boost the competitiveness of Maine agriculture and forest products and secure a prosperous future for our state.

Friedman, Shari. "Farms Here, Forests There: Tropical Deforestation and U.S. Competitiveness in Agriculture and Timber" Spring, 2010.

For more information, please visit:
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