

Palm Oil can be part of the solution Part 2

Emissions can be reduced through changes in farming practices and improvements in efficiency, but most importantly we can store carbon in the soil of our pastureland and cropland, picking up some of the slack from our fossil fuel emissions. Getting agriculture right is crucial to solving a whole set of 21st century challenges.

So this brings us back to the climate negotiations and the road to Copenhagen. Through the hard work of many countries and NGOs, slowing deforestation (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation - REDD) will likely be a part of the deal. Agriculture however hasn't had the same champions and has languished in the halls. Some forest advocates are even anti-agriculture, considering it the enemy of intact, natural forest. As a result, despite strong interactions on the ground, the two sectors don't tend to coordinate policy or strategy. The forest negotiations have also been very complex, with countries advocating different approaches that are most advantageous to their own circumstances. Adding the tremendous complexity of agricultural interests to the mix ratchets up the discussion past the point of comprehension. The Doha round of WTO negotiations have broken down over issues in the agriculture sector and adding that difficult negotiation to the climate agreement seems unwise.

In the end though, an environmentally robust climate deal will have to address agriculture, both to take advantage of its mitigation potential and to ensure it does not undermine the forest portion of the deal. Countries have put placeholder text in the negotiating documents broaching the topic. Organizations like FAO and the Terrestrial Carbon Group have analyzed how we might implement solutions. On June 6th, alongside the negotiations, the UN Convention to Combat Desertification hosted "Land Day" to broaden the discussion beyond tropical forests and into the world's drylands. Even Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), the top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, sees the link between agriculture and climate change in the international deal, according to his senior aide, Mark Helmke. There is still a great deal of work to do to ensure the global climate deal addresses the finite supply of land, water and biomass holistically but, as we hurtle (or trudge, it feels like both at the same time) towards Copenhagen, there are encouraging signs that agriculture will be on the table. THE END