



Prepared on 31/08/2019 by Stephanie Meier.

Living Lab project summary – Combatting Deforestation in the Soy Supply Chain: Suitable Initiatives for Products at the University of Edinburgh

Description of the paper

This paper examines initiatives to reduce deforestation in the soy supply chain, in particular certifications that are relevant for food products at the University of Edinburgh (UoE). This includes the context of the increasing soy consumption in Europe that corresponds with deforestation rates in Brazil and the wide range of governmental and private initiatives and certification schemes to reduce this deforestation. I argue that the certification schemes adhere to the theories of Environmental Governance and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Sustainability (CS), but their practical application is insufficient. Nevertheless, these certifications may reduce the risk of deforestation in soy products of the UoE. To show this, I critically analyze the concepts of CSR/CS and Environmental Governance, in particular in connection with deforestation measures. These theories I utilize to determine the relevant aspects from the Certification Assessment Tool of WWF to develop my own analytical tool to analyze the most prominent international certifications for soy production, namely ProTerra and RTRS, as well as a sample of products from the UoE.

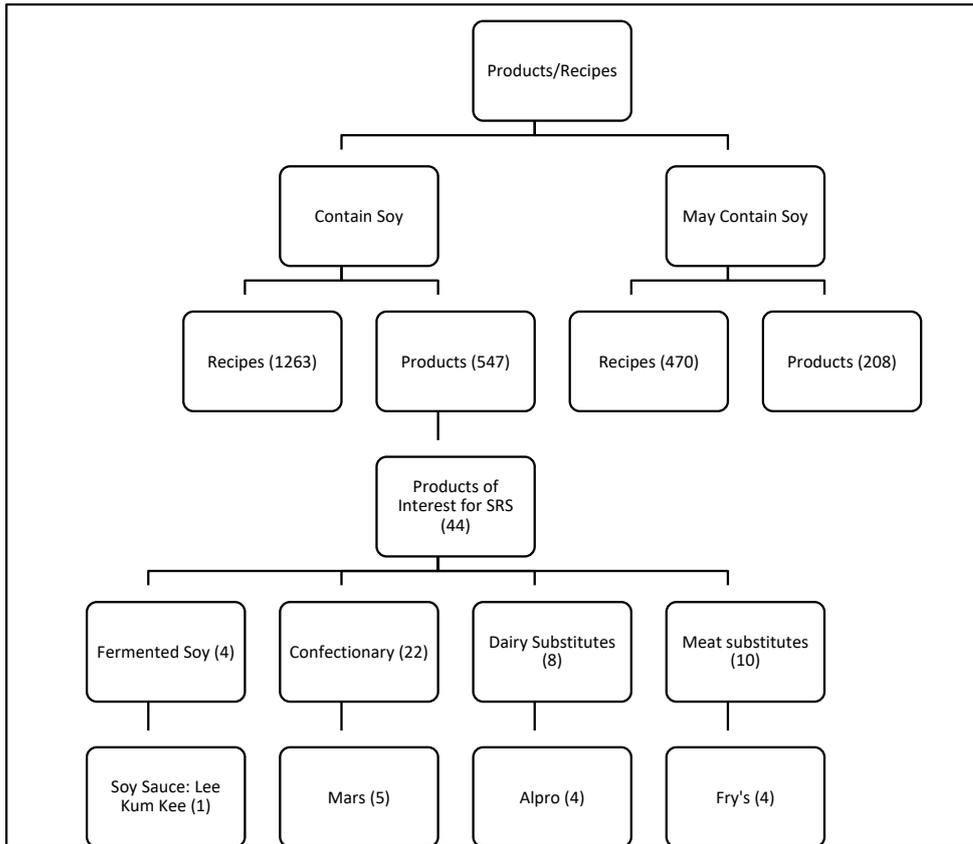


Fig. 1: Selection of products at the UoE

Research question

The main research question is the following: What initiatives and strategies are suitable for the UoE to reduce the risk of deforestation in its soy supply chains? To determine the relevance of this question for currently used products at the UoE, it is also necessary to determine the current status of sourcing and certifications of soy in these products. Therefore, there is a sub-question about the case study of products at the UoE: From a sample of products at the UoE, how well do these align with relevant certification standards?

Objectives

The aim of this paper is to determine what actions the UoE can take to reduce deforestation in the supply chain of their soy products by examining certification schemes and a sample of soy products at the UoE.

Findings and recommendations

My findings show that the ProTerra and RTRS certifications are structured according to the principles of environmental governance, and despite minor differences in their governance and standards, they are criticized for the same issues in their implementation as environmental governance and CSR/CS. These issues include the certifications being too supportive of the current market and thereby inhibiting radical change, in particular concerning discrimination of smallholders, unspecific certification criteria and low distribution of the certifications. However, if applied, these certification schemes can have a positive impact on deforestation rates, therefore they are still a viable approach to reduce the risk of deforestation. In terms of the sample of products at the UoE, I found that certification schemes for soy are not widely distributed in the UoE products. Also, the sources of the soy ingredients are not always mentioned, which impedes the estimation of the risk of deforestation in these products. However, the investigated products provide a viable alternative for the UoE soy sourcing, namely the availability of soy from Europe.

Hence, I can make two main recommendations for the SRS Department at the UoE. Firstly, for products that contain soy that is sourced from Brazil, the sourcing of soy certified with ProTerra or RTRS is recommended. Secondly, the example of Alpro shows that there are food products available with soy sourced in Europe, hence this would be a strongly recommended alternative.

As high amounts of soy are used as livestock feed, a relevant topic for further research is the examination of the soy used in feed for livestock in the UK, in particular such that are used for meat and dairy products at the UoE.