



# Commitments and connections made for the future of responsible soy at the RTRS annual roundtable in Lille



Couldn't make it to Lille? Looking for a refresher on what you heard at RT13? Here's our summary of the highlights of two days of dialogue and progress on responsible soy.



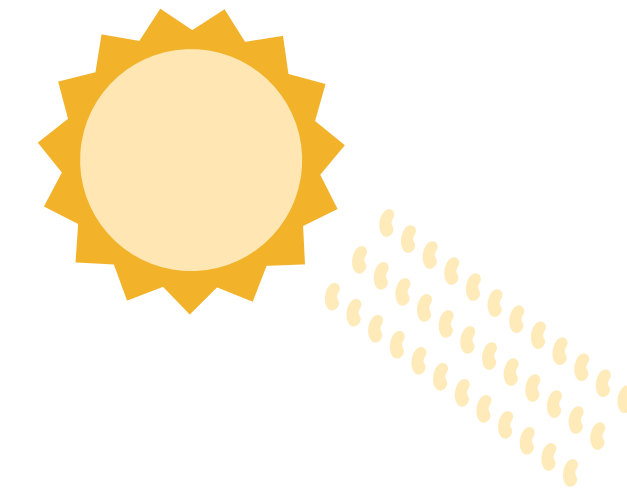
The movement for responsible soy took a significant step forward in May 2018 as 180 major participants from every part of the soy supply chain gathered together in Lille, France, to renew, extend and refresh their commitment to delivering a major change in the production system for one of the world's most important agricultural commodities.



Alongside major retailers, global non-governmental organisations and household brand names, attendance at this year's annual conference of the Round Table on Responsible Soy Association (RTRS) was further bolstered by major soy producers, too including eight co-operatives who together represented 11% of soy production in Brazil, the world's largest producer of soy.

Also at the RTRS Annual Conference (RT13) there were governments from France, Brazil and Paraguay and representatives from Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Mozambique, USA, and many countries from Europe.

RTRS President Marina Born opened the conference with the news that RTRS had seen a year-on-year increase of 30% in production of RTRS-certified soy. She outlined three core objectives guiding the organisation into 2018 and beyond: "to make our Round Table THE multistakeholder organisation where sustainability improvements were to be discussed, decided and advanced upon for the soy supply chain; to make RTRS' certification system a motivational tool for producers, a tool for Industry, trade and finance to show their commitment, an inspirational tool for NGO's to always look for improvement and a



**"We have achieved a lot but still have a way to go."**

**Marina Born – RTRS President**

bar setter for other organisations to follow, and to make RTRS a truly sustainable organisation in its planning, in its management and in its global communication."

"There is no commitment without implementation, so we have to expand demand and production of responsible soy," she told delegates. "With a growing global population in the same land space and with more mouths to feed, both animal and human, we have achieved a lot but still have a way to go."



## Social and environmental progress

The keynote for the conference was delivered by noted thought leader Jonathon Porritt MBE, who drew on his wealth of experience of corporate leadership on sustainability, and specifically on palm oil, to outline the need for action on soy to be part of a global shift towards 'regenerative agriculture', where the process of feeding the world puts back more into society and the environment than it takes out.

**"You champion a strong standard, a large number of growers, supportive retailers and a rising ambition to become an agent for transformative change."**

**Jonathon Porritt MBE**



A core section of Porritt's keynote was dedicated to the fact that RTRS is showing leadership by making action on social issues a priority, alongside deforestation: "I never heard one Western NGO talk enough about the social and economic benefits for countries [of growing soy]. If you don't take into account a wider perspective what makes you think anyone will take notice?" he said.

And alongside calling out the 'blockers' to progress, he outlined that it was the soy industry itself which was "crucial" in making change happen. That great campaigners, politicians and socially-responsible retailers all had a part to play but it would be the soy industry itself that makes change happen.

And finally Porritt called on RTRS to "embrace the value of being a purposeful talking shop":

"I have huge respect for your organisation," he said. "You champion a strong standard, a large number of growers, supportive retailers and a rising ambition to become an agent for transformative change."



# Demanding change



The opening plenary session of RT13 focused tightly on how global demand could be further stimulated for responsible soy. A representative from Fazendas Bartira-Brazil, pointed out that in Brazil there are 206 certified farms of which 190 are in the much-publicised Cerrado region and that RTRS certification did much more than halt deforestation. "There are so many other benefits" he said. "Better social and environmental practices, better production controls and performance and an increase of income to local communities related to employees' better salaries." said Luiz Jaquinta.

He also outlined the productivity 'lift' seen on certified farms, rising from the Brazilian average of two and half tonnes of soy per hectare up to four.

The other major questions in the conference session on demand included the critical issue of definitions. When we look at the Cerrado and we look at the conversion of grassland (said David Cleary from The Nature Conservancy), "what does a deforestation commitment actually mean?"

Inevitably in this session and in the later parallel workshop session on demand, one focus fell on the consumer and consumer awareness. The Bel Group and Lidl both outlined the value they felt from telling a story about sustainable soy and the difference they were making by working with growers to achieve a change that connected emotionally with their customer base.



## Spotlight on the Cerrado

An area three times the size of France, the Cerrado region takes up on quarter of Brazil's land mass and, according to a Cerrado native Tiago Reis is "one of the global biodiversity hotspots on earth, a unique biome." The second plenary session of RT13 focused in some detail on the initiatives and coalitions that are coming together to try and halt deforestation in one of the worlds' last great natural areas.



"One thing I take from this is the urgency" said Edegar de Oliveira Rosa of WWF. "We are losing around a million hectares of the Cerrado each year through conversion," "This may be the biggest frontier in the world in terms of agriculture and it is possible to expand agriculture on degraded pastures, without any deforestation or conversion of natural ecosystem; farmers can be a prime mechanism for making the change happen."

One key message was that the destruction of the Cerrado was, above all, a short-sighted strategy. The implications of deforestation include less evapotranspiration, less rainfall, fewer clouds, less replenishment of aquifers and so less fresh water for farming. The protection of the Cerrado was, in fact, the protection of farming.

A final speaker was Daniel Salter of Tesco, speaking as a signatory to the 'Statement of Support (SoS) for the Cerrado Manifesto'.

The SoS is a response to the 'immediate call for action' from over 60 Brazilian civil society organisations to buyers of soy and cattle products from the Cerrado. As of today, 66 global companies, including retailers,

manufacturers, livestock producers and feed companies that buy (or use) soy and cattle products from the Cerrado have become signatories and recognise the need for a more sustainable pathway forward for agricultural development in the Cerrado.

SoS signatories are currently developing an Implementation Plan. The objective of this plan is to collaborate, align and support action by local actors on the ground in Brazil. In addition to providing an industry leading standard, SoS signatories also see that RTRS also has a role to play as acting as a global sustainable soy platform that convenes all stakeholders for the development of innovative approaches to achieving sustainable soy production, such as jurisdictional approaches.

One key question debated in the plenary session on the Cerrado was the issue of legal versus illegal deforestation. WWF raised the example of the Cerrado, where 85% of the deforestation that occurred between 2003 and 2014 was within the limits of the forest code (according to data from the University of Wisconsin). This example emphasises why voluntary commitments are so important.



Two breakout groups at RT13 tackled the major issues of how greater collaboration could make responsible soy a mass market commodity and also what's needed to drive up greater levels of demand.

## Collaboration and the mass market

In the session on collaboration Arla Foods began the session outlining how retailers are a vital part the dialogue and how in Sweden, at a national scale, they had helped transition the market to 100% responsible soy.

A range of models for collaboration were outlined, including the Swedish Soy Dialogue, the Collaboration for Forests and Agriculture and the UK Sustainable Soy Initiative.

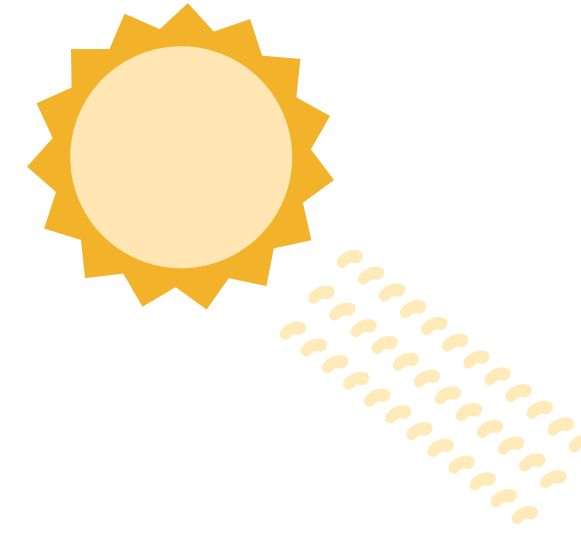
"The session heard how government support can help to drive collaboration forward on soy, and from Jean-Francois Timmers, Soy Lead of WWF on the opportunities of conversion-free soy expansion on vast already deforested, degraded pastures, and on how the partners involved in RTRS needed to turn their attention to land speculation, which creates a speculative 'bubble' that is driving deforestation and conversion."

## Linking supply and demand

In the parallel session on connecting supply with greater demand there were NGOs, traders, growers and retailers discussing ways in which a stronger connection could be made between consumers, industry and growers in the field.

Speakers highlighted the work in Brazil, India and Africa to create more demand for responsible soy, with Pramel Grupta of Vrutti for example, talking of the 40,000 tonnes of newly certified soy in their Indian network, and how farmers had responded positively to being involved in RTRS certification.

There was also news of the results of the first year of a project in Mozambique, Africa, fostered by Solidaridad Network, to support 2,000 soy farmers to improve soy production through sustainable farming methods, which results in 223 farmers



RTRS certified achieving an average soy production increase from 1.2 to 1.5 ton/ha, among other positive outcomes.

Telling stories, and inspiring people, were themes of the discussion with speakers from Bayer and ACT Commodities suggesting that more work needs to be done to communicate the impact of RTRS certification, particularly to buyers and their customers.

Finally led by Christophe Callu Mérite, the session closed with a lively discussion on how small an incremental increase in cost certified soy represents – just a few cents – if it is shared across the supply chain and not solely pinned against the cost base of feed companies.



## Creating social change

Closing the first day of RT13 was a session on addressing risks in the soy value chain emerging from social issues, and interrogating the question as to whether RTRS certification can play a part in securing more inclusive economic development.



RTRS board member Juliana de Lavor Lopes from Amaggi opened the session by outlining how social responsibility had been her route into sustainable soy 12 years ago. "From the beginning of RTRS one of the biggest challenges was discussing social issues," she said. "Sustainability is not just about environmental issues, but also about social and economic outcomes, too."

Speakers from Amigos da Terra, Imaflora and Fapcen all re-iterated that if unsustainable soy displaced investment in other crops and agricultural activities, particularly alongside speculation in land values, it could aggravate income disparities and poverty, and how a very basic challenge in many soy growing areas was the high levels of entrenched poverty and illiteracy. Certified soy could help underpin better working conditions and improved health and safety, but there was a limit to how much impact soy could have in some areas where government policy was unsupportive.

"The social differences in the northeastern states of Brazil, Maranhão and Piauí, where they grow soybeans, are immense," said the Fapcen CEO Gisela Introvini. "Encouraged by FAPCEN, they adhere to the RTRS certification, they have come to contribute to the communities around the farms, and they participate in projects that involve schools, machinery donations and equipment, agricultural inputs and training people to come to work on rural properties."

Having done so in these regions, there was a great increase in income and job creation.

In addition, there was a greater involvement with the military police, agrarian defense agency, fire brigade, federal highway police regarding the use of agricultural pesticides, residue and packaging of agrochemicals, all of them adhered to large projects that encourage children to preserve the recognizing native species of the Cerrado, collecting seeds, planting seedlings in agribusiness cities," she states.

Didier Bergeret from the Consumer Goods Forum spoke of how their initial approach to issue an industry Resolution on zero deforestation with brands like Tesco, Nestlé and Ahold Delhaize is now being applied to human rights and social conditions. "We carried out a wide industry and stakeholder survey to identify our most salient human rights impacts as per the UN Guiding Principles on Business & Human Rights. Our collective issue and challenge as identified by most is forced labour," he said. "So CGF board of CEOs signed up to the first industry resolution on forced labour and established a set of three Priority Principles to support its implementation by tackling the most common forms of forced labour identified: 1) Every Worker should have freedom of movement; 2) No Worker should pay for a job and 3) No Worker should be indebted or coerced to work."



## Social or environmental? Choose both.

Marcelo Visconti, RTRS Executive Director, took to the stage and delivered a progress review for 2018.



"The market has discovered that RTRS certification means zero deforestation and zero conversion of high conservation value and native vegetation in the Brazilian Cerrado for example, and that, as being holistic, at the same time recognizes that social and environmental responsibility go hand-in-hand".

"The view of RTRS is that we have to work together in a collective and holistic way. If you think about future generations, I have an important question for you," he said. "Is it possible for us to choose between protecting the forest and different community rights? Is it possible for us to choose between protecting the forest and forced labour? Between protecting the forest and delivering a right to a minimum wage? At RTRS we realise that we cannot."

**"The speed depends on us. Our commitments must be turned into concrete and absolute steps to drive change. Today we want to make a strong call for a significant increase in demand."**

Marcelo Visconti

"Change is happening, and very fast," he told delegates. He outlined a 30% increase in RTRS certification in the preceding 12 months, and the fact that for the first time RTRS has certified soy production in Africa. The increase in production was welcome, but with only an 8% increase in demand for certified soy that year, the urgent challenge now was to drive up demand.

"A lot has been achieved but we know we should move at a much faster speed," said Visconti. "The speed depends on us. Our commitments must be turned into concrete and absolute steps to drive change. Today we want to make a strong call for a significant increase in demand."





## Citizens of the planet

A truly global tone was set by the second day's keynote speaker, French Ambassador for the Environment, Xavier Sticker. Welcoming delegates to Lille, Sticker outlined the perspective of 'a consumer country' that was proud to take a lead on major international issues like climate change or biodiversity and that was taking the commitments made under the Paris Agreement seriously.



"France is preparing for a dedicated national strategy against imported deforestation," he said. "We also expect initiatives at the level of the European Union, as called for by the group of European States signatories to the Amsterdam Declarations against imported deforestation, that France is currently chairing."

He stated that alongside action by the private sector to eliminate deforestation from its supply chains, governments of consumer and producer countries had a role to play.

He also felt that the people themselves played a part. "Consumers are more and more conscious of the impact of the products they buy, and they change their purchasing habits: They care for the protection of the environment and behave as citizens of the planet," he stated. "We need to help the consumers make informed decisions and to give them the right incentives."

At a European level, there are plans he said, to draw up an overarching sustainable protein strategy, with a view to transitioning to protein sources that did not have so damaging an impact on the environment.

In producer countries, he said, there is a need to anticipate and plan for the growing expectations and increased requirements from the consumer side in terms of sustainability. Traceability, transparency, robust certification schemes need strong commitment all along the production and commercial chains. However, sound and effectively implemented public policies – like sound management of forests, spatial planning, promotion of agroecology and respect for land rights – are no less crucial to make change happen.

"There are many streams that need to flow for our river of sustainability to widen and reach its estuary, and we must all favour the outflow, including governments from consumer and producer countries," he said.



# What can governments do?

The penultimate session of RT13 turned its attention to the role of government, and how there is still a clear legislative challenge for lawmakers in the global North and South, to bring their practices and policies into line with broader commitments to halt deforestation.



Researcher at IPAM Marcelo Stabile told delegates that under current legislation, legal deforestation is also critical. The area which could legally be deforested in privately held landholdings in the Amazon could still lead to the loss of an area of rainforest larger than the UK. IPAM is working on the CONSERV project, aiming to compensate farmers for the preservation of these areas. Coupled with growth plans for production in many of the key states in South America, the question to answer is how to improve conservation and increased production irrespective of any conversion of natural, thus ensuring an adequate climate for production in future generations.

Paraguay is the fourth largest soy exporter in the world. Gustavo Rodríguez of the Paraguay Government explained to the conference that since 2004, it has had a law that prohibits the conversion of native forests for agricultural activities or livestock; an action taken specifically to preserve the forests of the eastern region of the country where, before 2004, deforestation was legal. This has been achieved by giving value to ecosystem services supported by the forests, especially the microclimate, protection of biodiversity, protection of water courses, and the possibility of payments for environmental services for holders of native forests, maintaining soy production.

For other panelists, there was a clear distinction between producer and consumer countries. For producer countries there are sharp issues of income equality, pressure for growth, and a wider need to work harder on the enforcement of legal constraints on deforestation, and on the push to improve social conditions.

As delegates heard, with 1.8 soccer fields of forest still being lost to ranching and/or soy production each and every minute, there is clearly a need for governments to act with some urgency. But there is considerable intelligence being produced to support this action – as illustrated by Raimundo Deusdará Filho of the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment. “We now have a huge system for monitoring; with information online and available to the public, covering 500 million hectares and besides consistent legislation. It’s a lot of data and a huge law enforcement effort, as a mission of the Brazilian state.” Deusdara explained.

One idea to accelerate certification and production was floated by Mairon Bastos Lima of Trase. “Could we one day certify an entire state as producing responsible soy?” He asked. “That would be something quite remarkable.”

His broader point was that territorial approaches – legislation, certification, supply chain measures – could be a new way of approaching the role of government in responsible soy, which would also enhance the traceability and transparency of soy supplies, too.

**“Could we one day certify an entire state as producing responsible soy?”**

**Mairon Bastos**



## Tooling up

Before winding up RT13 with a closing debate, there was an exposition of data gathering and monitoring software tools that showed how everything from satellite data to gamification was currently being used to improve the management and traceability of supply chains.



## Closing thoughts

The final session of RT13 gave a number of the conference moderators a chance to feed back and summarise their headline thoughts across the two days, on what holistic approaches to responsible soy supply chains should look like in the future.

Demand and how to increase demand, was a constant theme through the panel discussion with debate around how to significantly increase demand of sustainable soy across entire markets and territories. This increase in demand could also be the key, it was felt, to help and incentivise farmers to extend their activities beyond what's legally required of them.

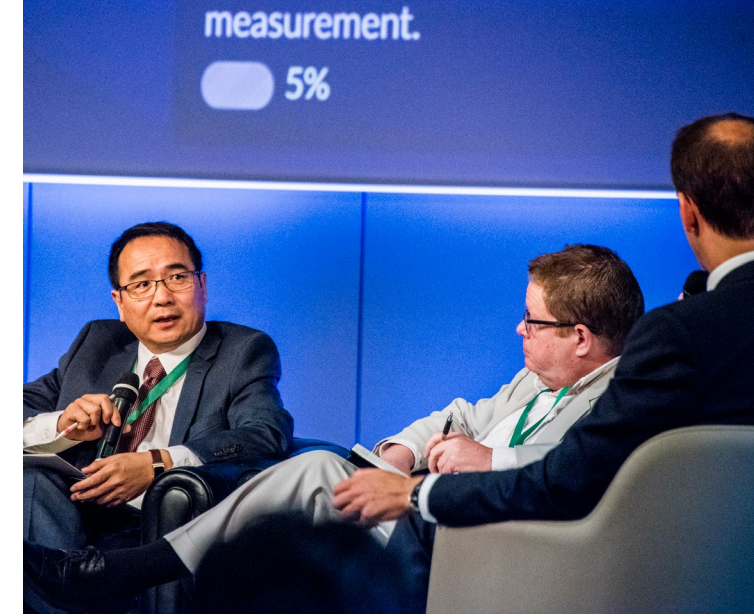
The idea of supporting farmers, and assuring them that responsible soy is worth pursuing, was also commented on by participants.

A resonant point made by one panelist was that the fact that every element of the soy value chain was present at RT13 was important because every part of the chain has a clear role to play in achieving responsible soy. Territorial legislation, civil society role, manufacturers and retailers goals and supply chain pressures are not mutually exclusive tactics for achieve responsible soy; they are all needed if deadlines of global commitments by 2020 are to be achieved.

**"This was our most holistic RTRS annual conference to date, covering equally the environmental, legal, economic and social issues we need to consider to meet our international commitments, particularly on deforestation...good discussions, new partnerships forged and tools for transparency shared that will help us to drive change."**

**Marina Born – RTRS President**







Watch the RT13 film

