

Greenpeace says Brazil soy ban small step

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RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil - The environmentalist group Greenpeace praised soy traders Tuesday for refusing to buy soybeans from newly deforested land but said the two-year ban is insufficient to protect the Amazon rain forest from destruction.

Cargill Inc. and other multinational soy traders agreed Monday to the two-year moratorium in response to protests against expanding soy plantations, which have become a major source of destruction of the rain forest.

"Industry has never taken such a bold step toward protecting the Amazon," Paulo Adario, director of Greenpeace's Amazon campaign, said by telephone from the jungle city of Manaus. "But it could have little practical effect."

The moratorium calls for monitoring of soy plantations, stricter enforcement of an existing forest code and collaboration with rural groups and the federal government.

Taking part are U.S. commodities giants Cargill, Archer Daniels Midland Co. and Bunge Ltd., as well as France's Dreyfus and Brazilian-owned Amaggi. Together, the companies account for the majority of the soy trade in Brazil, the world's No. 2 producer after the United States.

A week before agreeing to the moratorium, Cargill, ADM and Bunge were named in an Associated Press story describing the anger of environmentalists and Brazilians over the area's soy operations. They alleged that Cargill's huge port on the Amazon river has encouraged nearby soy farmers to destroy rain forest.

The Brazilian Vegetable Oils Industry Association, or Abiove, said its members would no longer buy soybeans from newly deforested fields in the nine-state Amazon biome, starting in the 2006-07 crop season.

"We take this business of social and environmental responsibility seriously. The farmers that want to deforest the Amazon to plant soy won't have access to our markets," Abiove President Carlo Lovatelli told Dow Jones Newswires on Monday.

But two years is an insignificant period for soy monitoring, especially for new producers carving plantations out of the rain forest, Adario said.

"Anyone who lives here knows that the first year you clear land, slash-and-burn and put some cows on the land," he said. "The second year you pull out stumps and plant rice. Soy is only planted the third year - after the ban loses effect."

He added: "Everyone could accept the moratorium today without changing anything ... We expected more."

Soy is the top cash crop in Brazil and is now a leading cause of deforestation in the Amazon. The Amazon lost 6,950 square miles of rain forest between 2003 and 2004, while some 4,633 square miles of soybeans were planted during that time.