

# Modern Slavery in Brazil

In Europe, slavery is commonly thought of as the eradicated practice of forcing Africans, deprived of personal freedom, to provide labour in the Americas. However, "modern" forms of slavery are still used in agri-production in Brazil, including the production of soy. This factsheet provides recent accounts and statistics on modern slave labour in the Brazilian soy sector.

## Labour conditions in Brazil

Wages and labour conditions for workers in Brazilian agri-sectors are poor and generally below Brazilian and International Labour Organisation (ILO) standards. In some cases, the conditions reach as far as modern slavery, defined as a combination of very poor labour conditions and the restriction of freedom of leaving the job due to severe physical, psychological or financial pressure (e.g. illegal debts). According to reports by the Brazilian Churches' Land Commission (CPT) rural slave labour is mostly found in the states of Mato Grosso, Maranhão and Bahia (North and Northeast regions of Brazil).

Although slavery is most commonly found on cattle ranches, it also occurs in the soy sector. Slaves are used during the establishment of soy plantations, which requires hard physical labour (e.g. deforestation and removal of roots) and for the application of pesticides without proper protection. There are very few jobs left for these workers once the plantation is established because soy is produced with a high level of mechanisation.

**PACTO NACIONAL POR LA ERRADICACIÓN DEL TRABAJO ESCLAVO EN BRASIL**

Considerando:

a) la existencia de una lista de empleadores y/o de sus intermediarios que explotan mano de obra esclava en Brasil (Circular MTE 540/2004), que utilizan coerción física y moral limitando la libre opción y la libre acción de trabajadores;

**PACTO NACIONAL PELA ERRADICAÇÃO DO TRABALHO ESCRAVO NO BRASIL**

Considerando:

a) a existência de lista de empregadores e/ou de seus intermediários que exploram mão de obra escrava no Brasil (Portaria MTE 540/2004), que lançam mão de coerção física e moral cerceando a livre opção e a livre

**NATIONAL AGREEMENT TO ERADICATE SLAVE LABOUR IN BRAZIL**

Considering:

a) that there is a list of all employers and/or their middleman who exploit people through slave labour in Brazil (Act MTE 540/2004) by means of physical and moral constraint restricting both free option and free action on part of the

**Ministério volta a fiscalizar e resgata 90 trabalhadores**  
**Há duas semanas, grupos do Trabalho retomaram ação de combate à escravidão**

Fiscalização é feita em Mato Grosso, Pará e Maranhão, onde bilizte encontraram condições de trabalho degradantes em fazendas

**CONRATÉ AO TRABALHO ESCRAVO**  
 Isolamento geográfico de fazenda é contra

**700 km**  
 Equipes de fiscalização com os fiscais para orientar a fazenda de acordo

**The Brazilian National Pact to Eradicate Slave Labour in three languages and a newspaper article about the liberation of 90 slaves. Source: Reporter Brasil**

## Statistics on Brazilian slavery

Between 1996 and 2007, CPT reported more than 50,000 cases of slavery in the Brazilian agricultural sector. Between 1995 and 2007, almost 29,000 slaves were freed through actions by the mobile inspection group of the Brazilian federal government on 1,913 farms. A total sum of 39.5 million reais (approximately €15 million) was paid to former slaves as unpaid wages.

The Brazilian federal government created a "dirty list" of estates that have been using slave labour. This list can be accessed through the following link:

[www.reporterbrasil.org.br/listasuja/index.php?lingua=en](http://www.reporterbrasil.org.br/listasuja/index.php?lingua=en)

Analyses of 2007 "dirty list" data reveals that 5.2% of the estates on the list produced soy. Most of the inspections at soy farms resulted in the release of workers that were involved in *catação de raízes*, the removal of roots and tree stumps before planting, or in applying chemicals to the crops.

## Combating slavery

In 2005, the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Instituto Ethos and Repórter Brasil launched the National Pact to Eradicate Slave Labour which was signed by more than 130 companies, representing almost 20% of the Brazilian Gross National Product. Abiove (Associação Brasileira da Indústria de Óleos Vegetais), the Brazilian Oilseed Industry Association was one of those who signed the Pact. Soy trading and processing companies like Archer Daniels Midland (ADM), Grupo Amaggi, Bunge, Caramuru and Cargill have all signed the document individually. Signatories of the Pact agree not to do business with companies, farms and other agricultural producers which are on the above mentioned black list of slave labour. The following five soy estates were still on this list on 9 April 2008: Ribeirão (Piauí), Carolina do Norte (Maranhão), São

Simeão (Tocantins), Roncador and Mattana (both Mato Grosso). A total of 121 modern slaves were freed from these farms.

In July 2006, Abiove and ABAG (the Brazilian Grain Export Association) launched the Soy Moratorium, in partnership with NGOs. One of the clauses in this moratorium states that the sector rejects the use of slave labour and that "the companies incorporate breaking clauses in their soy buying contracts, if slave labour is identified".

Of the five largest companies in the soy segment in Brazil – ADM, Amaggi, Bunge, Caramuru and Cargill – at least the last three received soy from estate owners that were on the "dirty list" since they signed the pact. According to the rules of the pact, commercial relationships should have been cut instead, as has been done by dozens of companies in the pact trading in other agricultural products.

#### Roncador Estate, Mato Grosso

One of the most striking slave labour cases in soy production is the one on Roncador estate, owned by Pelerson Soares Penido. In August 2004, 28 workers on this estate were liberated from slavery, amongst which were five adolescents.

Roncador estate is one of the largest in Brazil; it consists of 154,000 hectares, of which 4,000 have been planted with soy at the time of labour inspection. The owner of Roncador estate owns many other companies, which together account for an income of 873 million reais (approximately €326 million), of which Roncador estate alone makes 30 million reais. What turns Roncador into a symbolic case is the fact that such a powerful company has committed a crime against human rights with the single purpose of reducing costs.

In April 2008, Roncador estate was placed on the "dirty list".

#### The Dutch market and modern slavery

Estates which supply soy to two of the biggest companies selling soy to the Netherlands are or were on the "dirty list" of slave labour. Bunge is known to have received soy from the owners of Carolina do Norte Estate and Aeroporto Estate when they were still on the list. Cargill is known to have received soy from the owner of Ribeirão Estate.

## The Dutch Soy Coalition

The Dutch Soy Coalition brings together Dutch civil society organisations working in the fields of nature, environment and development. The coalition was founded in response to alerts by partner organisations in South America about the negative impacts of soy production and expansion. The Netherlands plays a central role in the soy sector as the second largest importer from South America and central distribution point for Western Europe. Therefore, the members of the Coalition see it as their responsibility to raise awareness with consumers and the media, and ask our government and companies to take steps to reduce the negative impacts of soy production and trade. Concrete suggestions of steps to be taken by companies and the government can be found in our publication "Big business, big responsibility: Addressing the social and environmental impact of the soy value chain", which is available through our website in English, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese.

The factsheet and case study series has been developed to stress the urgency of the problems and the need to take action. They feature specific cases of social or environmental problems in particular soy producing countries. Should you wish to get in touch with the Dutch Soy Coalition or receive more background information on the issues, please contact the secretariat of the DSC at [nsc@bothends.org](mailto:nsc@bothends.org) or refer to our website <http://commodityplatform.org/wp>. An overview of the sources used for this factsheet is available on the DSC website ('Links and Documents' section).

