

AGROFUELS

Starving People, Fueling Greed

[Transcript]

Text on Screen: The following is a companion piece to the bicycle adventure film, "Ciclovida: Lifecycle." For more information, visit www.ciclovida.org.

Title Screen: Agrofuels: Starving People, Fueling Greed

Narrator: Until recently, industrial agriculture produced food and textiles. But the advent of plant-based fuels has created a massive new market, increasing the production and power of large agribusinesses accordingly. Steadily swelling monocultures of soy, sugarcane and eucalyptus, grown to produce fuel for transportation and industry, now encompass over forty-five million hectares in Brazil. Along with this increase in demand and production has come a resurgence of indentured servitude and modern day slavery. Monocultures -- vast expanses of land planted with a single crop variety -- have swept across South America like the fires that precede them. Slashing and burning as they go, these atrocities destroy everything in their path: Forests, wildlife, rural communities and even the soils and rivers on which they feed, leaving behind barren wastelands while decimating global biodiversity.

Text on Screen: Brazilian Forest, 1994.

Winti: In 1994, the deforestation began for the planting of soy. At that time, there was a lot of forest left. There is more deforestation now than ever, and today you can't find forests like you could in 1994. Since then everything has been clear-cut. There used to be many, many trees, but today there are practically none left. This is very sad to see this, and it's very worrisome.

Rachel Smolker: It's very easy for companies to come in, and governments in collusion with those companies to come in, and just displace them off the land and take that land over. This is happening on an incredibly rapid scale and an incredibly huge scale throughout many parts of the world.

Inácio do Nascimento: The countryside is deserted. All you find are monocultures. Before, when you saw big plantations, you would see tens, hundreds of people working, weeding, cultivating by hand. Today you don't see that. You see one or two people riding on a tractor to cover a large area rapidly and it's no longer weeding. It's spraying herbicide, weed killer.

Ismael Oliveira: Here enter the big businesses and conglomerates who acquire these lands, but the effects are on the ground level. Indigenous people live there, native species are there, and the riverside inhabitants, who have no land documentation and nothing to

protect their way of life or the boundaries of the land that they have always used. The moment someone comes in and says they own the area, the locals are evicted. Their goal is to clear everything and leave huge open areas of land for planting soy.

Inácio do Nascimento: There are encampments surviving near these huge plantations of soy where fumigation planes pass over spraying toxic chemicals. These trees here were planted by these farmers to try to prevent the pesticides from coming over here.

Ivânia Cavalcante de Alencar: You were speaking of a farmer who died at age forty from the chemical sprays here... What was his name? Do you remember?

Man: Roman Santi, a Paraguayan man, married with 17 family members. He died and others are dying because of the pesticides as well.

Text on Screen: Worldwide, an estimated three million cases of pesticide and herbicide poisoning occur every year resulting in an excess of 250,000 deaths. (World Health Organization)

Winti: In our region there are Bunge, Cargill and ADM that plant soy.

Brian Tokar: These three companies virtually monopolize the basic processes of moving large quantities of grain around the world and milling and crushing and processing them, both within the food industry and outside of the food industry.

Narrator: These companies do not own agricultural land directly, but they finance large-scale farmers with operating expenses, provide the seeds and agrochemicals from their partners and, finally, buy back the harvest, thereby dictating which huge monocrops take over which regions.

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

Inácio do Nascimento: Many agribusiness companies have invested a lot of their research into adapting plants to their patented pesticides. Some in the field include Syngenta, Novartis... there are several others, but the main one is Monsanto. Monsanto is the big monster with various affiliates and many different names. Where there's not much sympathy for them, they just use a different name.

Text on Screen: "*Monsanto*", "*Monsoy*", "*Braskalb*", "*Seminis*", "*De Ruiters*", "*Forensa*", "*Roundup*", "*Agritec*", "*Acceleron*", "*Coelagro*", "*Asgrow*", "*Genuity*", "*Vistive*", "*Monsanto*."

Ivânia Cavalcante de Alencar: Their propaganda is very powerful. For example, on *Globo*, an important TV station, you can see a Monsanto commercial and mistake it for an ecological awareness commercial, a promise of paradise and of saving the world, of feeding the world, and they are here to save the world from hunger. What they don't make clear in the media is what the effects are, but there are terrible consequences.

Text on Screen: Monsanto Advertisement

Narrator: In 1980, the U.S. Supreme Court controversially ruled that living organisms, created in a lab, could be patented. The agrochemical companies who were losing command of many markets with the banning of DDT and other highly toxic pesticides and herbicides jumped on this opportunity to regain their control over world agriculture. They continue to patent all of the plants and bacteria that they view as their proprietary creations, and then they use the court systems and legal pressures to establish and maintain agricultural, economic and political power over large portions of the globe.

Tom Goldtooth: They've introduced these artificially created organisms into our environment and it has affected already our native, our traditional, foods we already have. Then they patent them. They patent it under these laws that don't recognize our rights, that don't recognize the rights of peasant farmers or people who have kept all this seed knowledge tucked away in their families for many generations. When they destroyed the native corn in Mexico, the country of Mexico now is dependent on a food crop that is genetically modified. But who owns that food crop? Not local farmers. No, the corporation. You've got to buy the seed now from the market. You've got to buy the seed from the corporations. They're making money on this modified organism.

Inácio do Nascimento: Here in Brazil, for example, Monsanto asked permission from the government to perform an agricultural experiment of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). The government allowed the experiment but found that they were planting huge fields. But instead of being penalized by the government for illegally planting GMOs, they pressured the government to legalize and make a market for the planting of the GMO soy that they had already illegally planted. For the big economic monopolies, laws are not a problem.

Text on Screen: Monsanto Advertisement.

Brian Tokar: So we have a monopolization of seeds by companies whose primary agenda is to impose this technology of genetic engineering on world agriculture. All of the qualities that the biotech industry has been promising have not come to pass. We don't have genetically engineered foods that in any way are more nutritious, that offer any real advantage in the long run to anybody but the corporations that are developing and patenting these traits.

Text on Screen: Three Companies: Monsanto, DuPont, Syngenta account for 47% of the world's seed sold on the market. (ETC Research Group)

Dara Bayer: They're controlling all the basic, fundamental resources that we need for our survival and those who are most affected are those who are most marginalized. So that usually translates to people of color, poor folks.

Michelle Mascarenhas-Swan: Today, corporations have basically hijacked our food supply. Our peoples were able to feed ourselves from our own land and our own labor. Corporations have basically taken over everything from seed to land to the production of food, the inputs. So what we get in our supermarket looks like we have this great array of choice but actually it's all put there by a very small number of corporations.

Tom Goldtooth: Indigenous peoples, the common people, the people at the grassroots. We have a right to know what we're eating because some of these foods are Genetically Modified Organisms.

Ivânia Cavalcante de Alencar: We know that it will be a big war because they have the government and market on their side. They have businesses and plantation owners buying up land. Everything will be to the advantage of biodiesel.

Food, Fuel & the Climate

Brian Tokar: With increased concerns about supply of oil, high oil prices and global warming, there has been an increasing shift toward diverting portions of the food supply to the production of fuel.

Thiago Roniere: You have large multinationals, first world countries trying to escape from the dependence on oil. Also within an environmental context around issues of global warming and climate change. They are forming alliances of oil companies with agribusiness companies, genetically modified seed producers, along with automobile companies. All these companies make up a single logic that tries to promote the production of Agrofuels.

Text on Screen: Former President of Brazil, Lula da Silva, meets with Agrofuel executives

Narrator: The term "Agrofuel" refers to fuel made from industrially grown crops, such as biodiesel from plant oil or fermented ethanol alcohol from plant sugars that can be used as gasoline.

Anne Petermann: When it comes to looking at the difference between "Biofuels" and "Agrofuels," Agrofuels was a term that was developed by people in the Global South to try to distinguish the fact that the word "Biofuel," in their opinion, was misleading because the root "bio-" refers to life. So the companies were trying to say this was fuel that came out of life and what they're saying is, actually, this is fuel that comes out of the agro-industrial complex and is very much not about life, but more about death. So they call them "Agrofuels" as a result. We try to differentiate by saying that Biofuels are small-scale, local, sustainable, locally used, locally produced. Whereas Agrofuels are large-scale, often imported and exported, using some unsustainable crop like soy, genetically engineered soy, or palm oil or something like that.

Tom Goldtooth: We think that using the word "life," the biology, the "bio-" which means life -- it's what we understand -- is again a corruption of the sacred. It doesn't mean "life." It's an Agrofuel. That's why we say, anywhere we go, don't use "Biofuel" as a term, it's "Agrofuel" because it utilizes these agricultural methods that is not sustainable. It's big-corporate owned. That's all they're about, corporations who are owning these things.

Narrator: Predominant crops used to make Biodiesel are oil rich plants, like genetically modified soy, sunflower and palm oil. The main ethanol crops are high in sugars like corn, sugarcane and sugar beets.

Inácio do Nascimento: Fields will be taken over by oil crops, no longer growing food for humanity.

Rachel Smolker: We've had a lot of discussion about the rise in food prices recently and there are many varying estimates about to what degree diverting food into fuel production has contributed to that. The World Bank has recently come out saying that about 75% of the price rise is a result. It's not rocket science to expect that if you divert a huge amount of, not just food crops but land use to producing fuel crops, that is going to have a very dramatic impact on food production.

Text on Screen: Biodiesel. The energy that you plant.

Narrator: When consumers are told that they can grow their way out of a food crisis and out of a fuel crisis and out of a climate crisis, all at the same time, who wants to question that wonderful news? But sadly, it's too good to be true.

Rachel Smolker: Climate change is not just about emissions from fossil fuel use. It's also about changes in land use patterns, and about degrading the biosphere's capacity to sequester carbon and other greenhouse gases and to be resilient in the face of climate change.

Text on Screen: One fifth of today's carbon emissions are a result of deforestation.

Anne Petermann: They are part of the problem because of the massive energy that it takes to actually produce the Biofuels, the Agrofuels. And of course, the energy that's taken to transport them. So all of these things have to be included in the equation of what happens when we use these Agrofuels in our gas tanks.

Brian Tokar: So this is not a viable solution. The demands on the land are inordinate. And the advantage, in terms of either energy production or helping the climate, the closer you look, the more it seems that those advantages really don't exist.

Tom Goldtooth: Rather than addressing the issues of consumerism and capitalism and, rather than addressing the issues of our energy addiction in the United States, they rather use technology to say, "Well, we'll create plants and food crops that are resistant to climate change."

Second Generation Agrofuels

Narrator: Cellulosic fuels -- dubbed the next or 'second generation' Biofuels by the mass media -- are a rapidly expanding technology in the agribusiness world. This process uses woody or fibrous crops...

Anne Petermann: ...Like trees or switchgrass or algae. The idea behind the cellulosic fuels is that you're going to use a non-food source such as a tree to manufacture ethanol.

Narrator: In addition to the dangers of terminator and genetic modification technologies being used on trees, these proposed new monocultures will still threaten small farmers, important natural ecosystems like forests and wetlands, the world food supply, and they have hugely detrimental effects on the climate just like their predecessors -- the first generation Agrofuels.

Anne Petermann: When you're talking about switchgrass, it's extremely land intensive. When you're talking about trees, they require land. They're still a competition for land. So, regardless of whether or not there are expanding soy monocultures to feed Agrofuel, there will be expanding something monocultures. Either they're eucalyptus monocultures or they're switchgrass monocultures or, whatever, they still require the same land that's currently growing food. So they're still competing with food. Industries' argument toward that has tended to be, "Oh, well we have marginal lands. We'll use these marginal lands," which is this mythic idea that there's all of these unused lands that are very poor, that would be perfect for Agrofuels, that can't be used for anything else. And the fact is these lands don't exist. So you have this process where people are being driven into the rainforest or you have them taking over lands where cattle are, pushing the cattle further into the rainforest. In the Global South, in particular, they're talking about land that is being used by somebody.

Brian Tokar: They tell us that Agrofuels will be largely derived from waste products. Whether timber waste from the logging industry or crop wastes from large scale agriculture, but all of these so called waste materials play a crucial role in the replenishment and rebuilding of soil.

Narrator: We also need to look at how much fossil fuel is being saved. With all of the transportation, petrochemical fertilizers and industrial farming and processing fuels, it turns out that, at best, there is only a very small gain such as 0.3 or 0.4%.

Anne Petermann: We already know that with genetically engineered crops, there's been enormous contamination problems. There are 148 documented cases of contamination that Greenpeace has on their contamination register alone and that's not counting all of the contamination that we don't know about. So the idea that they're now moving from crops, which are a domesticated, single-year species for Agrofuels, into trees -- which have many wild relatives, live for decades, can contaminate, spread their pollen in seeds for hundreds, if not thousands of miles -- is completely insane. But yet this is the direction that they're

moving because they are bound and determined that they are going to continue to have their corporate profits as long as possible. The second generation Agrofuels are going to greatly increase deforestation, which is going to have a huge impact on the climate.

Rachel Smolker: So, it's really not a solution to energy security in the way that it has been promoted and it's not a solution to climate change because of the very devastating effects of our current methods of large-scale agriculture.

Anne Petermann: But, as we've seen with the rising critique about using food crops, countering it is possible.

Resistance and Towards Solutions

Christiane Campos: This year the theme of March 8th was the struggle for food sovereignty and against agribusiness.

Text on Screen: Food Sovereignty

Christiane Campos: In Pernambuco, women attacked monocultures of sugar cane. In São Paulo as well. Here in Rio Grande do Sul, the targets were green deserts because we've seen here is that where eucalyptus and pines have advanced. The first people to be expelled from agriculture are the women.

Praia: I went up Vulture Hill to see this place's beauty. They pump water out of the lagoon to water their sugar cane plantations. It's that green field you see. And the sugar cane factory, Ypioca, up there on the hill. The lagoon had dried up in several places. This harms us, hurts our food source. And harms the fish who are dying in the lagoon. The community came together and did an action, and went there and dismantled their pump. Just now, through struggle, we won the demarcation of our land. Now we have to get rid of the companies that have intruded on our land.

Tom Goldtooth: For corporations, the bottom line is money. They're not accountable to the people of the world and that's why, you know, we are starting to organize as indigenous peoples with our brothers and sisters all over the world.

Anne Petermann: How can we work in solidarity with the people whose lands are being most directly impacted by Agrofuels?

Text on Screen: Biofuel = indigenous slave labor, destruction of our land and culture, rise in youth suicides.

Andrea Samulon: There's a lot to be done in the U.S. on educating the public. First of all, about who these companies are. Who are ADM, Bunge and Cargill. They're not consumer facing companies. What does soy and palm oil have to do with deforestation? And food sovereignty and community resistance. People in the U.S. and people who live where these

corporations are headquartered and have power, need to also take responsibility to think about how they can support and help strengthen the movements that are resisting on the ground that are being directly impacted by corporations. It's very important to let the corporations know when you're living in their backyard that you don't tolerate their practices here or anywhere else.

Text on Screen: Root cause

Tom Goldtooth: Let's look at the root cause of climate change and that's capitalism. The market is not sustainable. It's exploiting nature and the natural resources of the world. It exploits workers throughout the world. It exploits the sacredness of our mother earth.

Patrick Keaney: Well I have a very strong and clear message to any consumer in the United States and that's that we're 4% of the world's population and yet we consume 25% of the world's energy resources. So my message to them, if they're watching, is "stop." That may sound funny coming from somebody who does fuel alternative energy for a living, but people say, "Well, once the restaurant oil runs out then won't we have to find something else?" Yeah, find a bike. Stop consuming.

Anne Petermann: I think the number one thing is stop buying stuff. The first step has got to be demand reduction because as long as we're using as much energy as we are, there's no sustainable solution. Whether Agrofuels are better than fossil fuels, to me that's really a false question. The problem is scale. We cannot continue to consume millions of barrels of oil or Agrofuels or anything. It's not a sustainable solution.

Text on Screen: Change how we live

Brian Tokar: And we need to fundamentally change the way we live to rely on the areas where we live to meet more of our basic needs.

Anne Petermann: In my estimation it's going to be a wide diversity of approaches that are locally appropriate, locally produced and locally controlled.

Text on Screen: Off the grid

Jason Corwin: For us, what "off the grid" means is we're getting all our electricity from a solar system -- a photovoltaic system -- that we built ourselves. We get all our heat from wood that's collected on the land around where we live and, for us, it's just putting our beliefs and our political and social ideologies, our concern for the environment, to practice. We're very much opposed to the commodification and manipulation of life. Opposed to it on moral grounds, spiritual grounds. So it's very important that people hang on to their heirloom seeds and to hang on to the genetic biodiversity that those seeds represent.

Text on Screen: Save heirloom seeds

Inácio do Nascimento: The Ciclovida project has been working for years on the campaign of preserving seeds. To have the freedom to plant them, save them and plant them again. It's a form of resistance against agribusiness for us to preserve seeds. If we disseminate them to the maximum number of people possible to propagate the seeds, then it's harder for them to run out.

Anne Petermann: When you put all the impacts together, the direct impacts and the indirect impacts, what we find out is that Agrofuels are bad for forests, and biodiversity and wildlife. They're bad for indigenous communities and they're bad for the climate, and there's really no excuse to keep moving forward with them except that corporations are trying to maintain their status quo and their bottom line.

Michelle Mascarenhas-Swan: What our communities need to be doing, and are increasingly doing, is building our own locally-based, community-controlled food systems.

Text on Screen: Locally-based. Community-controlled

Tom Goldtooth: We don't see Biofuels, Agrofuels as a solution. It's a false solution. It doesn't look at the heart of the causes of climate change. We have to look at our whole energy needs, so we have to go local.

Text on Screen: Go local

Text on Screen: Take action: www.Ciclovida.org. For more information on the Ciclovida project and to order Ciclovida:Lifecycle, the documentary of Inacio and Ivania's bicycle journey across South America, visit www.ciclovida.org.

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