

Biomass and Land Conflicts

Keywords

- > Eucalyptus monoculture
- > Brazil
- > Agrochemicals
- > Water pollution
- > Cultural and Environmental Impacts
- > Large-scale wood production

Introduction

São Luiz do Paraitinga (Figure 1) is a city located in the Valley of Paraíba in the São Paulo area. The municipality covers an area of 617 km² (Oliveira, 2011) and has a total population of just over 10 000. Historically, small holder agriculture was the main activity of the city, focused on the production of basic food. The city has a strong tradition (“*bolsão caipira*”) related to the land and the safeguarding of rural culture (Brandão, 1995), however, the quality of its soil has recently suffered due to changes in economic activities, namely, the incursion of eucalyptus production .

Eucalyptus arrived in the municipality as a result of government incentives during the military dictatorial period in the early 1970s. It first came to a farm where live 50 families worked producing many agricultural products, and raising pork and cattle (Toledo, 2012). Now the area has been reforested by pulp mill industries that have increased eucalyptus plantations for cellulose production, with three large producers in the region (Silveira, 2008; Cantinho et al, 2011; Toledo, 2012; Veiga, 2013).

In this context a movement of local resistance has evolved, in defense of the the community’s culture, environment and health.

Background

Suzano Papel e Celulose, Nobrecel, and Votorantim Celulose e Papel (VCP) are the three main industries that have promoted the expansion of the eucalyptus monoculture in São Luiz do Paraitinga (Silveira, 2008; Cantinho et al, 2011; Toledo, 2012; Veiga, 2013).

Suzano obtained their first property in the city in 1971 and started industrial wood production. In 1990, the Votorantim industry started their wood production, buying properties that belonged to the “Papel Simão” group (another company dedicated to paper in the city). Nobrecel acquired a property in 2003 and in 2004 began to apply a herbicide called Scout (produced by



Figure 1 –São Luiz do Paraitinga municipality (Source:<http://www.skyscrapercity.com/showthread.php?t=1647408>)

Monsanto), polluting nearby groundwater (Figure 2).

The Eucalyptus Plantation Expansion

In the 1990s, eucalyptus monoculture covered 8,95% of the total area (5.527 ha). By the following decade, the total area planted with eucalyptus had increased to 7.836 ha or 12,7% of the total area of the municipality (Oliveira, 2011). By another estimate, in 2010, eucalyptus monoculture was estimated to cover 4.972 ha (Cantinho et al, 2011). While this latter figure is somewhat disputed due to the different methodology used, it still exceeds World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations of a maximum planted area of 5%, in order to avoid negative environmental impacts and threats to the security of food production.

In 2005, VCP rented a farm of 188 ha. Part of this farm lay in the rural area and part in the urban area. As a result, in the downtown it was possible to see the eucalyptus trees that covered the hills from the city centre (Toledo, 2012). One study determined that the plantation had crossed over into a protected area (Arguello 2010), an APP (Permanent Protection Area) established by national law, home to rivers, springs and floodplains. The study pointed to an overall increase in the amount of eucalyptus planted in the area between 2000 and 2007 (Figure 3).



Figure 2 – Rural property affected by herbicide poisoning from eucalyptus (Source: Marcelo Toledo).



Figure 3 – Eucalyptus monoculture in São Luiz do Paraitinga (ESKINAZI & SOUZA, 2013). Picture by: Bruna Garcia Eskinazi.



Figure 4 – Eucalyptus monoculture surrounding the São Luiz do Paraitinga municipality (Toledo, 2012). Picture by: Marcelo Toledo.

The Impacts

Local residents, academic researchers, politicians and social movements have denounced several impacts caused by the eucalyptus monoculture in the region. These impacts can be categorized as related to environment, health, culture and socioeconomics (LIS/ICICT/Fiocruz; Ab'Saber, 2010; Arguello, 2010; Oliveira, 2011; Toledo, 2012).

- **Environmental Impacts** – water contamination by agrochemical use, the incursion of eucalyptus plantations onto permanent preservation areas, the intensive use of water for wood production (at the expense of natural forests and food production), biodiversity loss from the use of herbicides and pesticides.
- **Health Impacts** – farmers and animals poisoned by herbicide and pesticide contaminated water
- **Cultural and Socioeconomic Impacts** – access to local chapels was restricted by surrounding eucalyptus plantations, preventing traditional celebrations and harming social interaction by the “island effect” (Figure 4), rural and urban depopulation caused by the loss of local livelihoods and few work opportunities, reduced taxation revenue

With regard to health, the poisoning of a farmer was investigated by an engineer working for the Public Ministry, producing incontrovertible evidence that the water and soil of the region had been contaminated by herbicides and anticides used in eucalyptus production

(Toledo, 2012).

As for employment, an estimated 350 people are directly employed in eucalyptus production, however, Toledo (2012) points out that these jobs are temporary and the workers are not employed by the Pulp Mill and Paper companies, but are subcontracted.

Moreover, the majority of workers are not São Luiz residents. Generally, they come from Minas Gerais and other States from the Northeast region.

The Conflict and Consequences

In 2007, a Civil Public Action was issued against Votorantim and Suzano companies, by a public defender from the de Taubaté municipality. In this document several environmental and social impacts were denounced, such as the contamination of water and reduced groundwater levels (LIS/ICICT/Fiocruz). According to the Public Defender that proposed the Civil Public Actions after social movement denunciations, the Nobrecel company had used the herbicide Scout, produced by Monsanto.

Soon after, several social movements began to protest against the use of herbicides in the eucalyptus plantations, denouncing the expansion of monocultures and demanding public intervention. The movements asked for the punishment of the three companies for the negative social and environmental impacts resulting from the monoculture model, for disrespecting labour and livelihood rights, and for the reduction in food production and the use of agrochemicals (LIS/ICICT/Fiocruz).

In 2008, the Court of Justice of São Paulo ordered the suspension of the expansion of eucalyptus plantations while an Environmental Impact Assessment was realized, and proof was sought that there were no significant

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impacts (Oliveira, 2011). In 2009, the Court of Justice of Taubaté decided to cease wood harvesting and transportation inside the buffer zone of the Parque Estadual da Serra do Mar (a Conservancy Unit) until the presentation of the Environmental Impact Assessment (LIS/ICICT/Fiocruz).

Since then however, a study investigating whether this public decision has been respected has shown that instead there has been a continuous expansion of the eucalyptus plantations in the area (Cantinho et al, 2011). These findings are similar to those of Arguello (2010), who also produced evidence that permanent protected areas are not being respected.



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More on this case

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