

# EATING THE EARTH INVESTIGATIONS



2020



THE BUREAU  
OF INVESTIGATIVE  
JOURNALISM

Stories that Matter



# The Bureau: Journalism that drives change

Through investigative journalism we expose systemic failings and wrongdoing to help people better understand our world.

With no corporate or political agenda, we uncover corruption, corporate incompetence and government failure, abuses of power and the human impact of injustice.

We reveal how issues harm societies and corrode democracy at every level - locally, nationally and globally.



We focus where our approach can make a difference in five main areas - environment, health, finance, big tech and UK issues (including local councils, housing and job security).

Our journalism is a crucial part of the change process - uncovering new evidence, engaging widespread public attention and demanding accountability.

This review looks back at investigations and impact from our Eating the Earth team in 2020.



## Eating the Earth

Climate change is one of the defining issues of our time. Accountability and transparency in corporate and government decision making and actions are crucial in shaping our shared future. Individual awareness, experience and choice are other important factors.

This year, our independent public interest journalism has brought power to the collective effort to drive positive change.

We've been exposing the mega corporations that are devastating the Amazon for profit. And while focusing on one vital forest, we couldn't ignore another.



The Cerrado - Brazil's "second Amazon" - is being grossly overlooked; we had no idea that this enormous natural biome was disappearing at an even faster rate than the Amazon. And the worst part? Much of this destruction is entirely legal under current regulations.

The scrutiny and public awareness our reporting brings is already having an impact. For example, major investors in this area have upped the pressure on global meat giant JBS, and the company committed publicly to improving their practices.



# British chicken driving deforestation in Brazil's "second Amazon"

November 2020

By Alexandra Heal, Andrew Wasley, Emma Howard, Alice Ross, Lucy Jordan, Harry Holmes

[Read the stories](#)

Working with Greenpeace Unearthed, ITV News and the Guardian, we revealed that huge areas of the Cerrado - Brazil's "second Amazon" - are being demolished to grow soya that feeds livestock all over the world.

We tracked 66,000 tonnes of soybeans produced in the worst deforestation hotspot of the Cerrado, shipped across the Atlantic to a processing plant in

the UK in a tanker leased by the corporation Cargill. From there Cargill sends soya on to the many British chicken farms the company contracts.

Those farms then supply companies across the UK including McDonald's, Tesco, Asda, Lidl and Nando's. Earlier in the year we revealed that half of UK chickens were produced by US agriculture giants.

The UK government promptly put out a statement in response to our findings to say it is proposing legislation that would ban agricultural imports linked to deforestation where that felling is illegal in the producer countries. But this wouldn't help in the Cerrado where, unlike the Amazon, the deforestation can be completely legal.

## Cargill: the company feeding the world by helping destroy the planet

Like the Cerrado, no one seems too familiar with Cargill, so we did a deepdive on them. Their near invisibility is no accident - anyone buying a fillet of "British chicken" wouldn't know the risk that swathes of one of the world's most important ecosystems had been flattened in the process.

And though it swims in secrecy, you'll find Cargill in almost every aspect of global agribusiness. Its multibillion dollar success has also come with a string of other allegations, including fatal food poisonings, agricultural pollution and child enslaved labour.



# Brazilian meat giant trucked cattle from deforested Amazon ranch

July 2020

By Andrew Wasley, Alexandra Heal, André Campos, Piero Locatelli

[Read the full story](#)

Our major reveal in July showed how cattle are being trucked from farms in Brazil where some parts of the land have been deforested illegally, to “clean” farms which feed the global beef industry. Working closely with Repórter Brasil and the Guardian, we identified trucks owned by the world’s largest meat company - JBS - transporting animals from embargoed land.

JBS had repeatedly claimed they are doing everything they can to make sure their supply chain does

not include cattle raised on illegally deforested land.

These findings were a result of a year-long investigation and we saw more than 100 stories published in 25 countries from South Africa to Singapore. In Brazil alone it appeared in more than 30 outlets including O Globo.

Northern Europe’s largest financial services group has since withdrawn its investment in JBS. Although JBS initially disputed our findings, they have now publicly pledged to combat destruction in the Amazon by monitoring their entire supply chain for deforestation by 2025.

“The world’s biggest meat supplier is a case study in how important environmental, social and governance issues have become for investors.

JBS SA is in an earnings sweet spot, smashing estimates with record profit. The stock is a screaming buy for analysts, with a potential return of 67% on average.

Yet it’s down 22% this year [c.\$10 billion] ... In recent months, JBS was accused by Greenpeace, Amnesty International and The Bureau of Investigative Journalism of buying cattle raised in deforested areas.”

**Bloomberg, October 2020**



# Development banks funding industrial farms around the world

June 2020

By Andrew Wasley, Alexandra Heal

[Read the full story](#)

Our investigation exposed the billions of dollars being pumped into the meat and dairy industries by development banks - despite warnings that global livestock production needs to be curtailed to avoid climate catastrophe.

Our partners included Disclose in France and Mongabay in the US and our findings were picked up across the US, Australia, Brazil, South Africa, Asia and Europe, in particular by financial outlets.

More than 30 NGOs across Europe wrote to the heads of the development banks demanding action in response to our findings. A group of 22 experts wrote an open letter, citing our work and saying banks need to divest from Big Agriculture.

In the UK, questions were raised in parliament following our investigation into [UK financing of global meat companies with strong links to Amazon destruction](#).



## **Brazil thanked Johnson for climbdown over Amazon fires**

March 2020

By Alexandra Heal, Andrew Wasley

[Read the full story](#)

In March we exposed how Bolsonaro's government secretly thanked Boris Johnson for his support against other EU leaders' reactions to the Amazon fires. This prompted strong and widespread response from the public on social media.



## The Amazon is burning... what can you do?

[Watch it back](#)

Following on from our investigation, we brought together a panel to discuss what it would take for ranchers and meatpackers to stop deforestation; how UK government and major retailers could have a major impact; and - most important of all - how UK consumers have the power to make a difference. With Daniela Montalto, Greenpeace Brazil, Mia Watanabe, Feedback and Kerry McCarthy MP.

## How is British chicken fuelling global deforestation?

[Watch it back](#)

As the British government considered plans to ban businesses from importing products linked to illegal deforestation, we held a discussion about the role the UK's favourite meat plays in climate change. With Diana Aguiar, of the Campaign for the Defence of the Cerrado in Brazil; Neil Parish MP, chair of the Environment select committee and former farmer; and Anahita Yousefi, sr. adviser at Rainforest Foundation Norway.



## Our team

We don't just report the stories, we try to maximise the usefulness of our work for other people. This is a key pillar of how we see our journalism driving change.

With this collaborative and strategic approach, this year we've seen more and more groups and individuals use our evidence to drive change.



Alexandra Heal,  
Reporter



Andrew Wasley,  
Lead reporter



Miriam Wells,  
Impact Editor

## 2020 partners





## Your support made this possible - thank you!

Adessium Foundation  
Bertha Foundation  
European Journalism Centre  
The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
theguardian.org  
Google Global News Initiative  
Hollick Family Foundation  
Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust  
Lankelly Chase  
J Leon Charitable Fund  
Luminate  
Open Society Foundations  
Paul Hamlyn Foundation  
Pears Foundation  
David & Elaine Potter Foundation  
Reva and David Logan Foundation  
Rudolf Augstein Stiftung  
Vital Strategies  
Wellcome

We're so grateful to the growing community of committed foundations and hundreds of readers like you who supported our work this year.

### **Investigative journalism isn't a quick fix.**

It takes time to uncover the evidence and it takes time to get people to notice. But when we take that time, we can get results.

## Join the fight for a fairer society

There couldn't be a more important time than now - as the pandemic has laid bare so many underlying causes of inequality - to support investigative journalism that drives change.

**Click here to support the  
Bureau with a monthly  
donation today**

**Yes! I'll help**

[thebureauinvestigates.com/support-us](https://thebureauinvestigates.com/support-us)