Growing Disaster:

How Agribusiness Expansion into Rainforests is Threatening the Climate

Tropical rainforests are disappearing at a rate of 100,000 acres per day. That's an area larger than the state of West Virginia. The expansion of industrial palm oil and soy plantations poses a major threat to the world's largest intact rainforests – the Amazon and the tropical forests of Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea. The primary cause of deforestation in the Amazon is the expansion of plantations for soy production, 60 percent of which is funded by U.S. agribusiness giants ADM, Bunge and Cargill. Palm oil plantations are expanding into the tropical forests of Indonesia, Malaysia and Papua New Guinea

Scientists agree that the world's rainforests are the best natural defense against climate change because they store vast amounts of carbon. For example, Indonesian old-growth rainforests store almost 750 tons of carbon dioxide – the equivalent of 620 flights between New York and London – per acre. When cleared, rainforests release that carbon into the atmosphere, furthering global warming rather than curbing it.

Rainforests are so dense that the most cost-effective way of clearing them is to bulldoze the trees and then burn the remaining vegetation. "Slash and burn" clear-cutting, as it's known, is so greenhouse gas-intensive that its practice has led to Indonesia being the world's third largest greenhouse-gas polluter. It also accounts for Brazil's standing as the world's fourth-largest emitter. Three-quarters of Brazil's greenhouse gas emissions come from deforestation. Amid the rainforests of Indonesia and Malaysia are peat swamps, which are drained to create industrial palm plantations. This process releases not only carbon dioxide, but also methane, a far more potent greenhouse gas.

Replacing rainforests with industrial agricultural plantations converts a vital carbon sink into a dangerous greenhouse gas emitter: As a sector, industrial agriculture ranks second only to coal power in contributions to greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition to warding off climate change by storing carbon, rainforests also help regulate global weather patterns. Moisture from rainforests produces rain that travels far away from the tropics. Destroying the last great rainforests will likely result in worldwide droughts that will have devastating economic and social ramifications

[1] *Global Forest Resource Assessment 2005*
[2] *Greenpeace, "Eating Up the Amazon"*