When Sugar Isn’t Sweet

Land grabbing is a bitter secret in the sugar supply chains of some of the world’s biggest food and beverage companies. Many small farmers are being kicked off their land—losing their homes, their food, and their income in the process—to make way for huge sugar plantations. But you can make a difference. Tell Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and Associated British Foods (ABF) to join the fight for farmers’ land rights.

The World’s Sugar Rush

As global demand for sweets increases, so does the rush for land to grow sugarcane. An Oxfam investigation has found that, in countries like Brazil and Cambodia, companies that supply sugar to Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and other food and beverage giants are kicking poor farmers off their land and violating their rights. Elsewhere, ABF—the biggest sugar producer in Africa—is reported to be linked to a range of other unresolved land disputes. Whole communities are losing their main source of food and income—but global brands like Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and ABF are doing very little to ensure that the land rights of communities where their sugar is grown are respected.

You have the power to push them to help end land grabs.

Farmland at Risk

- In developing countries, the rush for land is intense. In the past decade, nearly 800 large-scale land deals have been recorded, covering more than 81 million acres.
- Some of these deals are what’s known as “land grabs”: land deals that happen without the free, prior, and informed consent of communities and that often result in farmers being forced from their homes and families left hungry.
- Although these large-scale land deals are supposedly being struck to grow food, the crops grown on the land rarely feed local people. Instead, the land is used to grow profitable crops for export.

BY THE NUMBERS

60+: The percentage of crops grown on land that has been bought by foreign investors in developing countries and is intended for export. This is especially problematic because two-thirds of agricultural land deals by foreign investors are in countries with serious hunger problems.

370+ million: The number of acres of land that sugar, soy, and palm oil production collectively use—an area almost three times the size of Spain.

51: The percentage of sugar produced that is then used in processed foods such as soft drinks, confectionery, baked goods, and ice cream.
THREE THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

1. THE BIGGEST FOOD COMPANIES HAVE GLOBAL REACH.
   - Companies like Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and ABF buy and produce huge amounts of sugar around the world and hold significant influence over the industry. Coca-Cola is the world’s biggest buyer of sugar and sells 25 percent of the world’s soft drinks. PepsiCo sells 18 percent of all soft drinks worldwide. And ABF is the largest sugar producer in Africa—where there is a growing rush for land.
   - These companies don’t disclose where or from whom they get their sugar.
   - They don’t have sufficient policies ensuring that their own operations and the middlemen they buy from respect land rights.

2. THESE COMPANIES COULD BE DOING A LOT MORE FOR FARMERS.
   - Oxfam spent 18 months looking closely at the publicly available policies of the 10 biggest food and beverage companies. Then, we created an easy-to-use scorecard—a “behind the brands” look—comparing and contrasting companies’ policies and commitments.
   - All 10 companies need to do a lot more to support farmers, communities, and our planet. Companies like Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and ABF have policies that are so slack they don’t even seem to know if the sugar they use is grown on grabbed land.
   - Here’s what we’re asking food and beverage companies to do:
     - Know how the sugar they source impacts communities’ access to land, and know whether they and their suppliers and bottlers are respecting land rights;
     - Show where the ingredients they use come from—and who grows them; and
     - Act by committing to zero tolerance for land grabs in their supply chains and their own operations. Work with governments and others to do the same.

3. CONSUMERS LIKE YOU CAN CHANGE HOW COMPANIES DO BUSINESS.
   - Right now, communities in countries like Brazil and Cambodia are standing up for their rights, by protesting against land grabs. And you can stand alongside them.
   - Use your consumer power to look closer at company practices and make more-informed choices. Even the biggest companies care what customers think—so when you speak, they listen.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

You don’t need to stop buying your favorite products. Instead, get the facts about the companies behind the brands you love. Find out what they could be doing to address the growing threat of land grabs that leaves families hungry and homeless. It’s time for action. Send a message now at oxfamamerica.org/behindthebrands.

STAY INFORMED: We’ll be monitoring companies’ progress on this and other issues. See our Behind the Brands scorecard for the latest updates on how your voice is making a difference: oxfamamerica.org/behindthebrands

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For more information and sources, see Oxfam’s report Behind the Brands: Food Justice and the “Big 10” Food and Beverage Companies, available at oxfamamerica.org.

ABOVE: Chief Ezequiel João and community members from Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil, say sugarcane plantations have led to deforestation and pollution. Tatiana Cardeal FRONT: Yon Ny of Koh Kong province, Cambodia, holds a bag of sugar. She had 24 acres of land before it was taken and cleared to make way for sugar plantations. Caroline Gluck / Oxfam