

ProTerra Certification in the Cerrado

Introduction

The ProTerra Standard for Social Responsibility and Environmental Sustainability, published in 2005, is based on the Basel Criteria on Responsible Soy. The aim of the ProTerra Standard is to foster good agricultural practice, the protection of high conservation value areas, the environment and biodiversity as well as the rights of rural workers and impacts on communities by linking production and demand of non-GMO commodities in full traceability.

The ProTerra Standard has been set through a transparent and public stakeholder consultation process, the latest of which took place in 2014, with a transparent tracking of the changes. During and after the consultation rounds, the ProTerra Certification Governance Board has discussed and decided on the inputs provided through the consultation process. As to the protection of high conservation value areas, in recent years, the focus has been directed to the Cerrado Biome in Brazil.

The Cerrado Biome

The Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics IBGE is the most reliable source for information about biomes, agricultural areas, census, and a wealth of information about Brazil land and population. In the map below the Cerrado appears coloured in a light pink hue. As can be observed, it is a very large Biome, stretching over various Brazilian States from Northwest to Centre-South-West of the Country. It is the habitat of a wide variety of fauna and flora, some of which are unique to the Cerrado. As identified by many organisations, it is one of the Biomes at highest risk of destruction today.

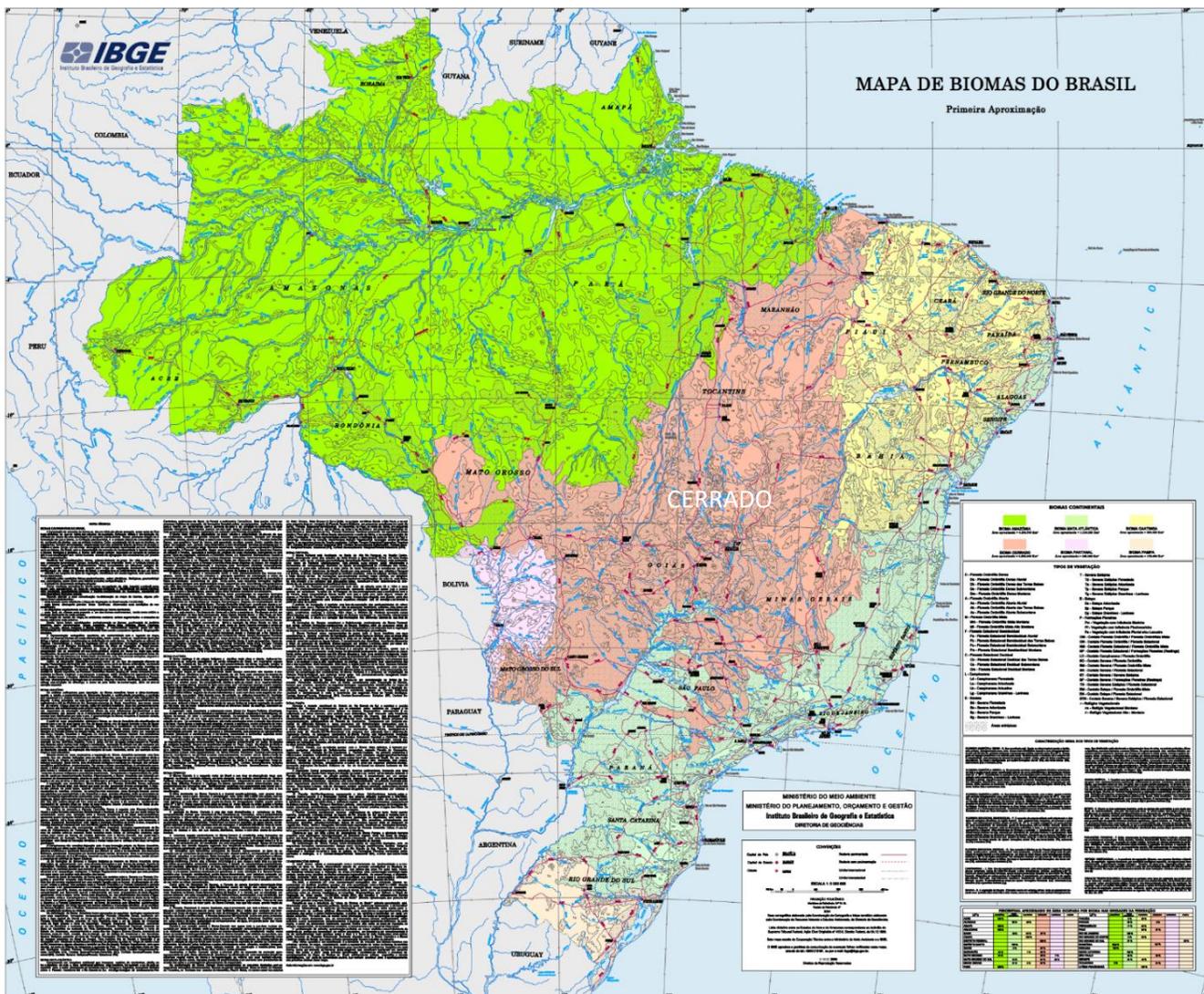
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Under the ProTerra Standard, no certification is allowed on land that was converted from a High Conservation Value Area into agriculture after 2004. This is the earliest cut-off date for deforestation of environmental certification standards, which target 2008 or later. Other important aspects verified are the non-negotiable criterion of land disputes or land grabbing from traditional land users.

ProTerra	2004
RSPO	2005
ISCC	2008
Bonsucro	2008
Brazilian Forestry Code	2008
RTRS	2016

In the State of Mato Grosso, many farms have been included in the ProTerra Program along the years since 2015, and only those that comply with the cut-off date have delivered crops that could be certified under ProTerra. In various municipalities in Mato Grosso, land use change has taken place before 2004. It is true that the Amazon Soy Moratorium was a great initiative that contributes effectively to the decrease of the pace land use change about the Amazon Forest. However, it may have caused leakage to the Cerrado Biome, especially in the new agricultural frontier of the States of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí, and Bahia – an area that was named *Matopiba* in the agricultural production realm. ProTerra certification in that region occurs only in the State of Maranhão and to farms whose land use change occurred before 2004.

Biome Map



Cerrado Biome in the map is depicted in a pinkish colour.

ProTerra Foundation Position

ProTerra Foundation supports the zero-deforestation concept.

This entails further study on how agriculture may continue growing to meet growing World population needs. Increase in production is going to come from tropical and sub-tropical areas. For a country such as Brazil, and the concept can be extended to regions with similar characteristics, the foreseen possibilities for increasing agricultural production without destruction of natural habitats and HCV areas are:

- Recovery of degraded land into agriculture. Large swaths of land in Brazil are subutilized because they lost topsoil due to long years of use under cattle farming or older agricultural practices, to mention a few causes. This requires public policies and projects, as it is more affordable to convert new land into agriculture than recover degraded land. This aspect in Brazil may be the main aspect to be addressed today, together with the use of chemicals.

- Improve animal farming methods in Brazil to release land under cattle and other animals into agriculture. Animal farming in many Brazilian is still quite inefficient. Integrated farming practices with agriculture and animal farming can increase efficiency.
- Innovation in agriculture, that enables production increase, and decrease in pollution and land use change. Innovation does not mean GMOs since GMOs did not live up to the promises of decreasing pesticide use or fertilizer – the largest cause of pollution in the world. The empty promise of alleviating hunger in the world is an obvious mislead since what can alleviate hunger is wealth distribution and economic activity in poor countries.
- Innovation should also lead to lower emissions from fertilizer. The whole industrial agricultural model based on chemicals must change and evolve into an environmental friendly productive system, if we are serious about habitat conservation and mitigation of global warming and climate change.
- Conventional methods to increase production and food security for small farmers such as intercropping, mainly in poorer countries, leaving room for growth of cash crops as well, for economic benefits.

The Cerrado Manifesto

ProTerra Foundation is aligned with the Cerrado manifesto, by default. Observations are that, as the Amazon Soy Moratorium caused leakage of industrial agriculture to the Cerrado, another 'moratorium', being good as it may, could cause similar leakage to regions suitable for producing soy, in Bolivia and Paraguay.

The fact of the matter is that agricultural companies have acquired areas in the Cerrado, under licensing process for land use change into agriculture. Due to the investments made, it is too late for them to revert this process immediately. Some of those have no plans for converting land after 2020, though. Further, the manifesto states the following:

"The undersigned civil society organizations call for immediate action in defence of the Cerrado by companies that purchase soy and meat from within the biome, as well as by investors active in these sectors. This includes the adoption of effective policies and commitments to eliminate deforestation and conversion of native vegetation and disassociate their supply chains from recently converted areas."

Conclusion

The statement 'disassociate their supply chains from recently converted areas' is important, for ProTerra certification program approves only areas that were converted into agriculture up to 2004. Thus, these areas are nothing close to recently converted areas. For ProTerra, declarations in line with the HCV concept, verification audits, and satellite imagery, can be used to support that claim.

It should be noted that the Amazon Soy Moratorium did not categorize all farms in the Amazon Biome as recommended for exclusion as to business by the Moratory members, but only those whose land was converted after 2008. The Manifesto, as the Moratorium, goes beyond the Brazilian law, probably already the most rigorous in the World, in terms of mandating native vegetation preservations areas in farms, and the conservation of permanent protection areas. The Manifesto is right in targeting the Brazilian Government, who, ultimately, is responsible for enacting laws that should make zero-deforestation mandatory. This last part is more complex to address, due to the heavy lobbying by the

private agricultural sector, whose focus is economic growth. The Manifesto fails to address the latter directly, understandably relying on the buyer end to control land conversion, as the end buyer organisations have the power to pull the chain.