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Newsletter 21

March 2011

What's really in  
your baguette?

*Special Report*  
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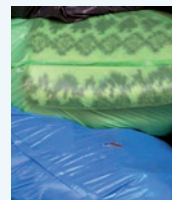
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## Tackling the resource curse

After the fiasco over the future of England's forests, the apparent abandonment of so-called 'Green ISAs' and the hypocrisy of the government's promotion of oil drilling in the Shetlands and Arctic whilst simultaneously calling for greenhouse gas emissions cuts, the coalition's credibility on green issues has taken a battering in recent weeks.

But, receiving far less attention, the government has quietly pledged to support groundbreaking laws that could positively affect the lives of millions in some of the world's most impoverished countries: George Osborne last month signalled the coalition's backing for the implementation of EU-wide oil, gas and mining transparency laws.

These laws, if introduced, will require companies listed in the EU to publish what they pay to foreign governments in order to extract minerals and other natural resources. This will vastly improve transparency over revenues - frequently shrouded in a cloak of secrecy - help tackle the corruption that has long been endemic in many resource-rich countries, and equip those living there with information to help them reap the benefits of their nations natural assets.

The proposed laws, which mirror US legislation and are being championed by France's President Sarkozy, represent, according to investigative campaigners Global Witness, the single biggest milestone in helping combat the so-called 'resource curse' - whether related to oil, gas or minerals, and even timber and other commodities - that has blighted many parts of the globe, Africa particularly, for decades.

This 'curse', which frequently sees huge sums of revenue from multinational corporations paid to often corrupt governments, results in last swathes of money disappearing into private bank accounts and propping up extravagant lifestyles - whilst the bulk of ordinary populations live in overwhelming poverty.

Osborne's announcement could prove highly instrumental in both getting the legislation enacted and in putting these crucial issues more firmly on the world stage - particularly as the London Stock Exchange is at the heart of global financial markets - and for that he, and the coalition, should be applauded. (The fact that the long awaited UK Bribery Act - passed with cross-party political consensus back in the spring of 2010 and designed to clean up the conduct of big business overseas - has yet to be implemented should give cause for concern however and indicates that scrutiny of developments is still required.)

So, whilst the coalition's green agenda at home is being met with fierce and entirely justifiable scepticism, its actions on the world stage - at least in relation to the UK's conduct over the plunder of the planet's natural resources - mean we probably shouldn't right off Cameron, Clegg, Osborne et al just yet.

Andrew Wasley, editor

*Front Cover: The truth behind the French baguette - Page 10.*

# The great wolf debate: hunt them down or let them flourish?



*Photo: The reintroduction of wolves into the wild is proving controversial.*

Long a symbol of the US wilderness - and a totem for the environmental movement - wolves are now the focus of a bitter conflict between those who want to increase the species' numbers and those that want to kill them.

**Joseph Mayton** reports

**T**he hills are covered in snow. The mountains' jagged edges force remembrance of the difficult terrain that surrounds Idaho's landscape. This is wolf territory, but for many American government officials, the reintroduction of wolves

in a number of states has led to overpopulation of the species. This led to the controversial green light being given for wolf hunting seasons last year - all in the name of 'conservation,' officials argued. The story begins back in 1995, when Idaho reintroduced a number of gray wolves into the state as

part of the 'experimental, non-essential' clause of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). From there the animals developed and grew in numbers across the state as wildlife biologists helped support the small ecosystems that were developed for the animals' use.

In North-Central Idaho in the United States Pacific Northwest, the Nez Perce Native American tribe also started their own project, which enabled a pack of wolves to live and create familial ties in a large fenced-in area. One of the biologists leading the project, Loren Kronemann, believes it was through the concerted efforts of biologists and the wolves themselves that they were successful in seeing the population grow.

'It was an amazing effort by our team of biologists, who helped maintain the health of the animals, studied their movement and behavior, which ultimately led to their complete reintroduction into the wild,' he told *The Ecologist*.

## **A threat to humans?**

According to statistics, in 2005 there were around 1,000 wolves in the state. Despite the progress and apparent success - the last wolf was seen in Yellowstone National Park way back in 1926 - the state government and many citizens

opposed the move, saying it would threaten human populations. 'The state was not too excited about the project at the beginning, but these are endangered animals who initially became extinct in the state because of human development,' said Kronemann.

Idaho and the northwest are not the only places where wolves have become a tipping point. In the Midwest, in the state of Michigan, governments have struggled to deal with a growing population - and the corresponding anger among the human population.

To solve what local governments say is the overpopulation of wolves, they instituted a hunting season against the animals. Towards the end of the summer last year, wolves in the Northern Rocky Mountains were taken off the Endangered Species Act and then put on the list of animals hunters could legitimately go after.

According to conservationists on the ground, the result was that in Idaho and neighboring states, entire packs were killed. 'What we saw was hunters going after packs of wolves as a team because it was easier to kill individuals that way,' said Idaho-based environmentalist Simon White. He monitored the situation for months and was disappointed by the government's refusal to put the waning number of wolves back on the ESA.

### Law in action

The hunting was forced to stop, however, after Earthjustice - a non-profit public interest law firm based in the United States that specialises in cases protecting natural resources, safeguarding public health, and promoting clean energy - filed a lawsuit in August against the removal of wolves from the ESA. They won, forcing state legislators to once again ban hunting of the embattled wolves.

This ban on hunting has not ended governments' attempts to put wolves back in the line of fire however. Idaho submitted a wolf-

killing proposal that would have left only a handful of the animals in the North-Central area of the state, the NGO claimed.

Now many officials are attempting to resort to what they have termed 'conservation hunts' aimed at reducing the population to a manageable number that 'protects their stability and longevity.'

According to the Idaho director of Wildlife Services, Mark Collinge: 'As the wolf populations increase, the depredations increase and the number of wolf removals will increase. It's very logical ... you just have to accept that part of having wolves is having to kill wolves.' Somewhat bizarrely, the Wildlife Services have even gone so far as to lobby the US federal government for permission to kill wolves to 'maintain the animal on the ESA.' Currently, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service is contemplating an Idaho request to do just that, in order to monitor the populations on the ground. Late last year, US Congressmen announced they would introduce a sweeping plan that would eliminate all federal protection for wolves. Their move has been seen by conservationists across the country as stepping back on the initial reasons for the 1973 adoption of the ESA.

'It's not clear when Congress will take up these measures, nor how far they're likely to go,' said Earthjustice in a statement on the matter issued in December.

### Conservation contradictions

If successful in their lobby efforts, Idaho would once again be allowed to remove wolves from protection and enable hunters to go after wolves.

For biologists such as Kronemann, killing wolves in order to protect them is contradictory. The Idaho biologist told *The Ecologist* that he believes it is simply fear that is driving government officials to push for hunting as a way to resolve the

situation.

Mark David, a University of Washington environment professor and wolf expert said that the governments in the country are missing the point. 'What they are doing is attempting to strike fear in the public after a few isolated incidents of wolves attacking local livestock,' he said. 'They don't see the larger picture of what is happening here in terms of over-hunting in general and the decline of a food source for the wolves.' He argues that wildlife experts are using hunting of wolves as a 'cop-out' to the real problem on the ground: over-hunting. 'In the past few years, we have seen the number of prey animals be reduced because officials are unable to enforce quotas and hunters are killing more animals than they are allowed,' he said.

When this happens, David said, 'We see predators creep ever closer to local populations where there are food sources available. Unfortunately, this has meant local industry has suffered and in very rare cases, people themselves are killed. But it must be put into perspective and [we must take into account] why the ESA was established in the first place.' As the controversy continues, one thing is certain, wolves are in danger. Kronemann said he is concerned by the local population's desire to rid the area of wolves without completely understanding the situation facing the endangered species.

'It is a quick and easy solution for many because they don't understand the history of wolves in the state and across the country,' he said. 'For the past decade and a half, biologists have struggled to move wolves back to their rightful home. There will be issues that come with this, but citizens need to understand that wolves are not out to get them. They want to survive along with the rest of nature. And they should.'

*Indigenous cultures hold the key to helping combat growing hunger and improving food security.*



# Do indigenous peoples hold the key to tackling global hunger?

Competition for land, water and energy are increasing, exacerbated by climate change and a growing population. But why does the Food and Agriculture Organisation now believe indigenous people could provide a solution? **Peter Giovannini** investigates

**E**ugenio was using some pieces of wood and a net to build a makeshift dam in a shallow area of the Maniqui River

in the Bolivian Amazon region. A university professor, four research students and I were standing at the edge of the river, up to our ankles in brownish water. With our hands we

formed a small barrier of sand and mud at the side of the river to close off the artificial pond that Eugenio had started on the other side, now within the river.

When the water in the artificial pond was almost still, Eugenio walked over to the canoe and took a bundle of sticks fastened together with strips of bark. He placed the bundle inside the shallow pond, took a stick in both hands and started pounding the bundle with it. While the rhythmic noise of the stick hitting the bundle kept time, a foamy substance flowed out from the bundle and mixed into the water.

Eugenio is a member of the Tsimané, one of the many indigenous groups inhabiting the Amazon basin, and he was showing us a technique for catching fish using a plant poison. This is not the only way the Tsimané hunt fish. They also use hook and line, nets and bows and arrows, but using a plant as fish poison was certainly the most unexpected and intriguing to me.

### **Indigenous stakeholders**

Indigenous people such as the Tsimané are now at the centre of the new policy on indigenous and tribal peoples published by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) at the end of 2010. The new FAO policy considers 'indigenous peoples as fundamental stakeholders and partners in development' and puts together principles to guide FAO interactions with indigenous communities. 'The fight against hunger cannot be won without them,' says Jacques-Diouf, the director-general of the FAO, in the foreword of the new policy document.

The new policy comes at a moment when the world faces new challenges for the environment and food security. The Foresight report on global food and farming futures, a UK government-commissioned study about food security published at the end of January 2011, stresses that competition for land, water and energy will increase in future decades along with the effects of climate change and

increased population pressure. The report suggests that the major challenges in the next decades will be achieving a sustainable balance between food demand and supply, maintaining biodiversity, ecosystem services, and mitigating climate change while feeding the world. The report concludes that investing in new solutions and new technology is a high priority in addressing these challenges, but there is scarcely any mention of traditional knowledge and indigenous people.

So why is the FAO now paying more attention to indigenous peoples? How can they contribute to the FAO's mission of achieving food security worldwide?

First, indigenous people include 15 per cent of the global poor (according to the UN definition of poverty) and are among the most food-insecure in the world because of the many challenges they face regarding land rights, acculturation – the loss of traditional culture and its replacement by a dominant culture - and changes in diet. In February 2011 six Wichí children, indigenous people living in northern Argentina, died of malnutrition. The appropriation of their lands, and their conversion to cattle ranches by outsiders, had a severe impact on their traditional food system and has left the Wichí particularly food-insecure. Oxford-trained anthropologist and ethnobotanist Dr Ian Fitzpatrick, who carried out an ethnobotanical study among the Wichí, reported that a considerable portion of the practice of collecting and consuming wild food, a practice that many indigenous people employ to increase resilience to food shocks, has been abandoned and potential food is left to rot in the soil.

During my own research among Mazatec indigenous peoples in Southern Mexico, I found both malnutrition and over-nutrition co-existing in the same communities. This pattern was probably caused by changes in diet and the collapse of the price of coffee, the major

cash crop in the area, on the international market. 'Coffee has no more value', I was told by several farmers who no longer considered it worth their while to harvest the coffee beans from the trees. Secondly, the FAO suggests that indigenous people can be important allies in the fight for food security and sustainable development. The idea that indigenous peoples and local communities can contribute to development, not only as recipients but also as equal partners, has grown in the last decades in different, but related, fields of development.

### **Biodiversity conservation**

In the last two decades researchers have noted that areas of high biological diversity often overlap with areas of high cultural diversity. Ten out of the twelve countries with the highest biodiversity on earth are also among the 25 most linguistically diverse countries and more than 1000 different indigenous groups inhabit tropical forest ecosystems where most of the biodiversity is concentrated. In other words, the areas that are richer in environmental resources are also the areas where indigenous people live. According to many, this is because they act as stewards of biological diversity.

The concept of biocultural diversity, which maintains that biological and cultural diversity are linked, has spread among environmental and cultural institutions, including international organisations such as UNEP, UNESCO and IUCN. As a consequence the conservation community has started to look at local communities and indigenous peoples as partners in, rather than as obstacles to, the implementation of conservation projects.

Luisa Maffi, co-founder and director of Terralingua, a non-profit organisation that pioneered the concept of biocultural diversity, said that there is now plenty of evidence that indigenous cultures

can and do support biodiversity conservation and work together with environmental organisations. Environmental stewards

In Ethiopia, for example, the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society supported and helped to revitalise the culture of the Gamo indigenous people because it recognised that the spiritual meanings that these people attach to their land, such as the veneration of sacred forests, are essential for the conservation of its biodiversity.

Indigenous peoples are also the stewards of a great deal of agricultural biodiversity, which includes the diversity of crop species and livestock selected through generations, a fundamental resource for breeding new crops in the future.

In 2001 the FAO negotiated the International Treaty of Plant Genetic Resources with the aim of promoting the conservation, exchange, and sustainable use of plant genetic resources. This treaty recognised the role that indigenous peoples play in conserving and developing crop diversity and their rights over traditional knowledge. For example, in the Andes indigenous people grow hundreds of different varieties of potatoes adapted to different altitudes and micro-climates. In Peru's Sacred Valley, close to Cusco, six Quechua communities created a Potato Park, a protected area of more than 12,000 hectares to conserve hundreds of potato varieties within their own habitat. The International Potato Center (CIP), the most important international agricultural research centre dedicated to the potato, supported this initiative through an agreement with these communities and repatriated some 400 potato varieties previously held in its collections.

### **Traditional products**

Timothy Johns, Professor of human nutrition at the Centre for

Indigenous People's Nutrition and Environment at McGill University, says he considers the ideas of the new FAO policy to be at the forefront of current thinking. He also says that urban populations in developing countries would benefit from more traditional products going to market as these are usually very healthy.

For example, during the biodiversity week held in Rome in May 2010, Dr. Barbara Burlingame, an FAO nutrition expert, showed how a local variety of bananas in the Micronesian Island of Pohnpei contains 25 times as much beta-carotene as the banana variety typically found in local shops and supermarkets. Burlingame explained how the vitamin A-rich local variety could make a significant difference in fighting blindness related to vitamin A deficiency. According to the World Health Organization, 250 million preschool children are vitamin A deficient and an estimated 250,000 to 500,000 become blind every year as a result of this deficiency.

### **Essential cooperation**

It is not only plant genetic diversity that is maintained by indigenous peoples but also agro-ecological knowledge, used for example to grow crops in dry or mountainous areas that are less suited to mechanised large-scale agriculture, and practices that increase resilience after shocks such as drought, flood, or pests. Cooperation between local people and scientists is going to be essential in encouraging the quick adaptation to new climatic conditions that will be necessary in the next few years.

'Many of the ways that indigenous communities are adapted to their very unique environment have a lot of important lessons and can be useful in other situations. Particularly when you look at Sub-Saharan Africa and semi-arid areas, there are all kinds of things that people do that could be applied

elsewhere,' says Professor Johns. But in spite of all these good reasons to engage in a dialogue with indigenous peoples, as FAO policy suggests, there are many challenges facing such collaboration. For example, local communities and small-scale farmers are increasingly integrated into market systems within which they are at a severe disadvantage. And the new FAO policy scarcely addresses food sovereignty, the right of people to have control over their food system rather than be dependent on international market forces. Via Campesina, an international movement of peasant farmers that coined the term food sovereignty, argues that major trade organisations such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund are undermining food security and food sovereignty as a result of their neoliberal policies.

'To bring indigenous foods and products successfully to the local market, these systems need to be invested in, they require some form of subsidies, changes in regulation and food marketing', says Professor Johns.

One of the major conclusions of the Foresight report on global food and farming futures is that policy on food systems must now coordinate its efforts with other sectors, and in particular with the environmental sector. The FAO's interest in indigenous peoples stems from an increasing awareness of the role that they can play in conserving the environment and the contribution that they can make to agriculture in the form of knowledge and genetic resources.

Ultimately, by engaging in dialogue with indigenous and local communities around the world the development and scientific community increase the number of available solutions and approaches, which are necessary tools in tackling the many challenges of achieving food security.

# Special investigation: What's the real environmental cost of the French baguette?



Water in France's 'breadbasket' - where much of the wheat used to make the iconic baguette is grown - is under threat from industrial agriculture, with excessive consumption and contamination by pesticides and nitrates. **Carolyn Lebel** reports

**T**o look at the ingredients, the making of a French baguette is child's play: about five parts flour to three parts water, some yeast and a dash of salt. But in France, baking bread is something of an art form and probably best left

in the hands of the country's vast network of artisan-bakers. Every year, about two million tons of crusty loaves emerge from the hot ovens of some 34,000 boulangeries. And while bread may have been relegated to a supporting role in the French national diet over the past century, the average Frenchman still devours well over a half a baguette a day.

Just an hour's drive southwest of Paris, an immense territory stretching over 7,500 square-kilometers produces much of the wheat that satisfies this appetite. It's called La Beauce, otherwise known as France's breadbasket. Geographically close to Paris and Versailles, La Beauce has always been linked to France's political stability, according to Steven Kaplan, an American historian specialized in bread and French history.

The N-154 is a popular highway for lorries transporting goods of all sorts from southern parts of France and Europe, to Paris and beyond. It runs through the heart of the Beauce, slicing through vast fields of brown chiseled earth and grassy wheat sprouts that stretch beyond the horizon on either side. This is no-nonsense rurality. There are no quaint fences, hedges or weeds to delineate the motorway from the endless sea of perfectly flat, monotonous farmland. For better or for worse, it seems to say, agriculture has been taken out of the fickle hands of Mother Nature and into the commands of global markets and industry.

Seen from above on a crisp winter day, the region resembles a patchwork of yellow, green and brown geometrical shapes, revealing vast monocultures of wheat, rapeseed and barley – winter crops. What is not visible from this vantage point is a massive underground water reserve that has allowed the region to emerge as the highest-yielding cereal producer across France, and possibly Europe.

### Water politics

The Beauce aquifer is one of Europe's largest, with a holding capacity of some 20 billion cubic meters of water. It sits under six French departments (counties) and two administrative regions (Centre and Ile-de-France), and feeds two major river watersheds (the Loire and the Seine). Until the explosive development of irrigation in the 60s, 70s and 80s, the aquifer had mainly been used to provide drinking water to the region's rural communities.

By the end of the 80s, a dense network of over 3,000 irrigation wells were pumping water from the aquifer at a rate of between 60 to 250 million cubic meters per year. Where once crops traditionally grown in the region had relied on the winter season's abundant rains for nourishment, new varieties of spring and summer crops - sugar beets, corn, potatoes, peas and green beans - were now being cultivated, flourishing under gushing showers of Beauce's subterranean waters.

The development of irrigation in the region also attracted food manufacturers and sugar refineries which forged tightly regulated contracts with Beauce farmers. Liberal access to irrigation was as much a contractual obligation for companies such as McCain Foods as the ability to produce potatoes of a predetermined shape and size to fit easily into factory machinery.

### Finite resources

Irrigation made annual precipitation cycles inconsequential. The skies had once dictated the annual fate of agricultural output in the Beauce, as elsewhere, but now farmers could look down to the blue gold under their feet.

Unlimited access to water, a small selection of high-yielding crop varieties and liberal use of synthetic fertilisers meant that farmers could now produce 90-100 quintals (approximately 9000

- 10,000 kilograms) per hectare, according to Lionel Vilain, an agronomist with France Nature Environnement, an environmental protection agency. Conventional yields are closer to 60-80 quintals (6000 - 8000 kilograms) per hectare. This sense of productivism became a part of the culture. 'For many years, the local press would publish articles promoting the record for the highest producer of the year. It became a sort of competition,' Bernard Rousseau, head of the Water Network with France Nature Environment, told *The Ecologist*. 'It was also in the interests of some very influential people in the region to promote this kind of mentality.' But a succession of dry winters in the early 1990s combined with the powerful pumping capacity of thousands of irrigation wells dropped the aquifer to its lowest level on record in 1994, according to Pascal Billault, a hydro-geologist with the Loire-Bretagne water agency. Until then, the volume of water used by irrigating farmers had almost never exceeded 250 million cubic meters. In 1991 however about 420 million cubic meters were siphoned for agriculture. Combined with the 100 million cubic meters required for tap water and industry, the well was essentially bottoming out.

### Legal action

The Beauce is not without its beauty. In the picturesque valley of la Conie, host to a conservation site and bird sanctuary, a river by the same name became the centre of a legal battle in 1992 when the Conie River simply dried up. One hundred and fifty locals formed an association and took the territorial government to court for failing to protect the river, fed by the Beauce aquifer. The association won some charges and lost others. But ultimately it was the start of a delicate political process that continues today to reign in the hefty demands of agriculture on the aquifer.

Territorial governments began issuing ad hoc restrictive measures, including limiting the number of days during which farmers were allowed to irrigate in the summer. And in 2000, eight years after the Conie River affair, a highly political multi-stakeholder commission (la Commission Locale de l'Eau, 'CLE'), was formed to negotiate quotas on water with Beauce irrigators. The negotiation process was made all the more complex by the 'multiplicity of actors' with legitimate stakes in the aquifer, says Olivier Petit, a French economist specialized in water governance. The 70-odd person CLE commission included state representatives from the six departments and two regions, from the two water agencies, from agricultural unions and chambers, from local industry and environmental organisations. Ultimately, an inherent complicity between elected officials in the region and a dominant agricultural sector meant that, despite its sheer size and diversity, agricultural

interests weighed in heavily in the commission. Negotiations were tough, says Rousseau, but the rules that came out of the process were weak.

However, the governance system put in place to protect the aquifer is a first of its kind in France. Water meters, financed through the water agencies, have since been installed on all of the irrigation pumps in the region. And farmers have begrudgingly been keeping records of their water use for state administrators.

'Farmers accept it as necessary evil,' says Philippe Lirochon, President of the Eure et Loir department's Chamber of Agriculture. For the aquifer is not exempt from another dry spell. A study carried out by Sami Bouarfa, an irrigation specialist with the Cemagref environmental research institute, found that, were quotas to be reduced significantly, the operational model put in place by farmers would become obsolete. 'It would mean a return to winter crops, requiring a whole other system than the one that has

been put in place progressively over the past 40 years.' The fate of the region's economy has become inherently tied to the aquifer.

### **Poisoned water**

While the CLE commission was preoccupied with cubic meters and quotas, an alarming public health crisis was slowly unfolding across the region, and most profoundly in the Eure et Loir department. On May 5th, 2005, a daily paper ran a short news piece with the headline 'One in five Euréliens drinks non-potable water. Beneath the headline was a series of maps from 1980 to 2003 depicting the rapid spread of nitrate contamination from synthetic fertilisers in the Beauce aquifer. In July 2008, after a nine-month ban on drinking tap water in one village, the mayor of Cormainville was forced to broaden the restriction to water for cooking.

Recent statistics from the Regional Health Agency reveal that about 40,000 people - 10 per cent of the region's population, mainly in the smallest villages - receive



*Cultivation of wheat for French baguettes - and other crop farming - is being linked to over-consumption of water and pollution.*

water that is unfit for human consumption, due to nitrate and pesticide contamination. Unborn babies and newborns are most at risk from nitrates, which are linked a condition called the 'blue baby syndrome'. Health risks associated with pesticides vary widely depending on the chemicals involved and type and frequency of exposure, but can, in some cases, include cancer and damage to the nervous system.

Part of the plan put in place to contain the looming public health crisis included a decision to abandon half of the department's most contaminated wells, and create of a network of pipelines to link up the villages. Were it not for these measures, which Gilles Deguet, Vice President of the Regional Council, acknowledges as temporary fixes, 40 per cent of the department would now be stuck with non-drinkable water. New wells must drill deeper and deeper to access clean water, but sooner or later 'the pollution catches up with you,' says Deguet.

Residents of the city of Dreux already pay almost twice as much for tap water than the average French citizen. And it's expected that the cost of water in the department will triple over the next decade. Like the wells, somebody will have to dig deeper and deeper into their pocketbook, but it is unlikely to be the farmers responsible for the pollution. Contrary to the EU's 'polluter-pays' directive, about 80 per cent of the fees collected by the water agencies come from residents. Jean-Claude Schmidt, who is responsible for the Eure & Loir department's water services, has the impossible job of trying to convince farmers in the vicinity of the department's 40 most important water collection points to change their ways. A perimeter of 1,000 to 7,000 hectares around each collection point has been drawn, corresponding to the area within which rainwater drains into the

aquifer. In these 'catchment zones', the idea goes, grassland buffers that soak up nitrates, and all round greener agricultural practices, will be cultivated. Should the plan work about 100,000 hectares - almost 25 per cent of the region's agricultural lands - could benefit from environmental protection measures.

### **Exacerbating pollution**

The idea is not a new one. About two decades ago, Nestlé Water's Vittel brand of bottled water found it necessary to invest heavily in repurchasing agricultural lands around their springs and co-opting local farmers to adopt greener practices in order to safeguard their product from agricultural pollution. But the public funds allocated to Schmidt's daunting task can hardly compete with those of a private company like Vittel. 'When the price of wheat took off this year, we weren't able to keep up. The compensations farmers were demanding were just too high,' says Schmidt.

A bullish wheat market does more than price environmental protection measures out of the market. It exacerbates pollution. Vilain describes an almost linear relationship between crop prices and the use of fertiliser and pesticides. In a bid to boost yields, 'when wheat prices are high, they use more fertiliser. From the rational economic perspective of a businessman, it pays to pollute,' he says.

If there's something environmentalists and farmers can agree on, it's that any long-term solution starts with economic considerations. While Vilain advocates a pan-European tax on fertilisers and pesticides, Cyril Deshayes, who heads WWF-France's fresh water department, speaks of the purchasing power of the government - which buys significant quantities of food for schools and hospitals - to establish contracts with organic farmers and create

a more favourable marketplace for organic food. Whatever the tactic, says Lirochon, 'We must maintain the economic balance of our farming enterprises, while responding to our obligation to consider the impacts of agricultural pollution on water.'

### **Inertia?**

As nitrate and pesticide molecules continue to percolate into the aquifer with no sign of abate, there's one word on the lips of experts. Inertia. Once here, the molecules will remain for a very long time. According to recent study conducted in the neighbouring Seine watershed, a full-scale conversion to organic agriculture is theoretically the only way to bring nitrogen contamination back in check, a scenario that Gilles Billen, co-author of the study calls 'utopian'.

But there's another kind of inertia that characterises this crisis, and it is human. For all the plant life that Beauce farmers nurture on their lands year after year, they then go and foul the element that is the very essence of all life, say critics. But it's easy to blame the farmers. Others are to blame too - from agro-chemical companies to EU policy makers. 'You just had to look at a map of agricultural pollution in France,' says Rousseau, 'to see how it maps up with European subsidies.'

Meanwhile, an officially sanctioned recipe for 'traditional' French bread reads: 'Flour is the most important ingredient. Its quality is a baker's first consideration... water is used to bind the flour particles together. Without it, kneading is impossible. Water must be potable, non-mineralized and with little chlorine, which would otherwise hinder fermentation...'

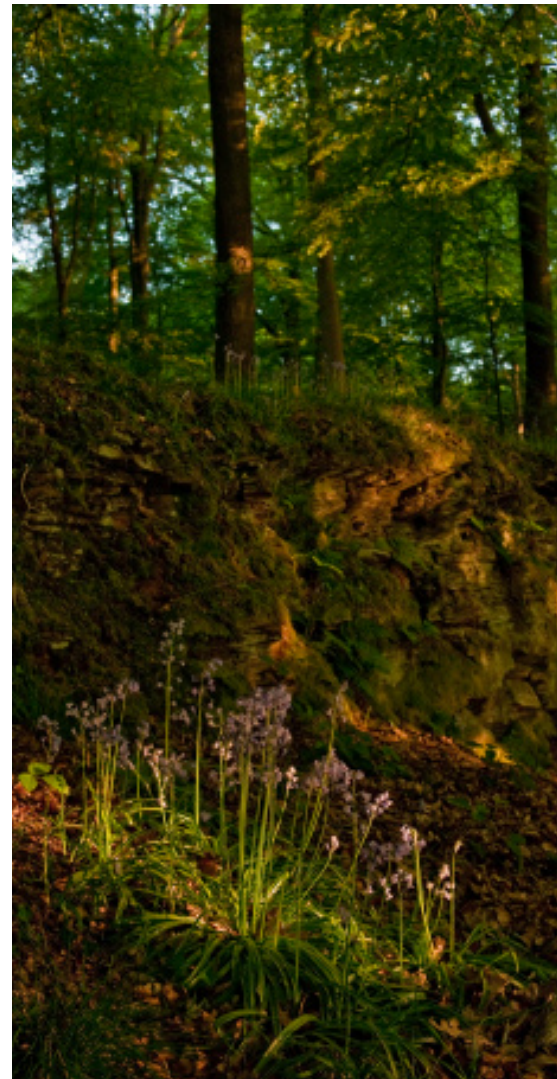
France's breadbasket may abound in wheat and flour, but it has forgotten the ingredient that - quite simply - holds it all together.

# Forest sell-off: the questions we still need answering

The Government's 'U-turn' on selling off our public forests is a victory for activists who now need to push for better protection and improvement says **Gavin Thomson**, a volunteer with the campaign group **38 Degrees**

**H**alf a million of us who joined the campaign to save our forests breathed a sigh of relief when the government backed down and kept our forests safe in public hands. This campaign victory was achieved by working alongside local groups, national organisations and some famous faces. It's a great example of that all-important truth: people power works. When the government's plans to privatise our woodlands were first revealed last year, thousands of 38 Degrees members discussed the plans on our website and Facebook page, and quickly voted to launch a campaign. The petition was started in October and eventually grew to be 530,000 strong. But, while it was widely discussed in Parliament and in the media, in many ways the petition was just the beginning. To move the campaign forward, and prove the size of the opposition to the Government's plans, 38 Degrees members clubbed together to pay for an opinion poll. The polling discovered that 84 per cent of the general public wants our forests to stay in public hands for future generations.

38 Degrees members went on to raise a further £60,000 to place adverts in national newspapers, publicising the poll result on the morning of an important vote in Parliament. Over 100,000 of us wrote to our MPs before the vote and, from the moment the vote was over, wrote to them again to challenge or congratulate them, depending on how they voted. In this campaign, there was huge support and tireless work from countless community groups and local woodland associations, while hundreds of thousands of us got involved from our desks or in our own front rooms. Meanwhile, on a national level, we worked with large organisations - Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and plenty of other household names. The reason why it worked, and why we succeeded, is because so many of us, in whatever way we could, got together and made our voice heard. Yes, we're celebrating, but we'll continue to watch this issue. There are still questions that need to be answered. A week before our big victory, we had persuaded Caroline Spelman to postpone a sale of 15 per cent of our forests pending the consultation - which is now



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## CAMPAIGNING

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cancelled. Is this sale of 15 per cent been scrapped along with the consultation? It's not yet clear. The cuts currently being imposed on the Forestry Commission – how will that impact our woodland? Will they have a negative impact? Are they justified? Further, how will levels of protection for our ancient woodlands be enhanced, in the way that others, such as The Woodland Trust, argue they should be? Our public rights to the national forests go back to the Magna Carta of 1215 and have come to form an important aspect of our national identity. When 38 Degrees members commissioned a YouGov poll, we found that support for publicly-owned woodland was unified across town and country, north and south, and supporters of all, or no,

political parties. It is impossible for the price of the forests, as determined by auctioneers, to reflect their value to our society - present and future. These areas are visited by millions of us, and the benefit our society in a myriad of ways. They provide a free day out to those on stretched incomes living in cities. In addition, it's been proven that woodland offers relief from stress and is beneficial for mental health problems. Perhaps the most important benefit of our public forests is on our wildlife. Currently, our forests are a large body of land that's managed to high conservation standards and provides critical habitats. Clearly, this is only going to get more important in times of ecological

stress caused by climate change. When announcing the decision to scrap the consultation process, Caroline Spelman also announced a proposal for a forestry panel, looking at the future of our forests. Hundreds of thousands of us will be watching that panel with a keen interest. We want to see the details, not only of who'll be on the panel, but also how we can get involved and help shape the future of our woods. An important lesson from this campaign is just how important our woodlands are to the British public - a lesson that this panel of experts won't be allowed to forget. People power works. We've always known this, and our recent success is a fantastic example of what we can accomplish. It's exciting to think about what we can do next.



*Thefts and frauds related to the recycled clothing sector is impacting on charity budgets.*



**T**he prevalence of cheap disposable fashion means people are buying more clothes than ever before. At the same time, every tonne of textiles diverted from landfill through reuse saves approximately 20 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, so the environmental benefits of reusing and recycling clothes are clear. But charities that rely on donations of unwanted clothes are facing an escalating theft problem that is threatening to undermine public confidence in recycling, which could ultimately hurt the environment.

Clothing collection crime is costing charities a conservative estimate of £15 million a year and amounts to a loss of around 10 per cent of all clothing donated, according to trade body the Textile Recycling Association.

There has always been opportunistic stealing of donations, but as the price of textiles has

surged over the last two years, commanding upwards of £1,500 per tonne in some cases, stealing from clothing banks and doorstep donations has become increasingly lucrative.

Oxfam says it has noticed the problem escalating particularly over the last six months to the extent that between 25 and 40 per cent of its 800 textiles banks are being raided weekly. 'This is costing the charity £0.5 million in lost revenue that would otherwise go to our humanitarian and international development programmes. And that's before the bill for repairing and refurbishing the banks,' says Matt George, head of logistics, Oxfam Trading Division.

Textiles recycling charity Traid, which has diverting textiles from landfill as one of its charitable aims and uses the profits from its donations to fund international development projects, has also noticed a steep rise in thefts from

its 1,000 banks nationwide. 'This has caused the charity deep concern, and we have responded by theft proofing all banks at considerable financial cost in order to protect donations made by the public,' says its chief executive Maria Chenoweth-Casey.

### **Audacious criminals**

But the break-ins are becoming increasingly audacious. Traid recently discovered one of its banks had had its chute sliced open in the car park of a 24-hour supermarket, and it is known that children are being used to climb into the banks and retrieve donations, so redesigning the chutes is one response to a particularly sordid practice.

Charities are also turning detective. Oxfam is using devices placed in its banks to measure their fill and when they are being emptied, which reveals that the thefts are mainly taking place at night at banks near

# Charities suffer as criminal gangs target lucrative clothing recycling sector

Charities, including Oxfam and Traid, which rely on donations of unwanted clothes are facing an escalating theft problem - which could undermine public confidence in recycling and increase clothing waste, reports **Louise Hunt**

motorway networks and ring-roads. Traid is using tracking devices in items of clothing in regularly targeted banks.

'You can follow the movement of the clothes through Google Earth and find their last destination,' says Chenoweth-Casey. One case led them to a commercial textiles dealer - stealing within the sector is not unheard of - another to a warehouse in Havering, London where the clothes were being paid for in cash.

While small-time theft remains a problem, the charities and commercial collectors operating on their behalf are agreed that the main perpetrators are organised crime gangs who are stealing the goods to sell internationally, in particular to Eastern Europe. Says George: 'We know there is a big market for textiles in Eastern Europe because we have a big legitimate market in the Ukraine and Poland. They see the UK as a

good source of quality textiles.' Charities say most of the arrests have been of Lithuanian nationals.

## Organised crime

He adds: 'Interest from the City of London police is becoming more intense as they think these gangs are part of a network of organised crime that includes activities such as people trafficking, benefit and credit card fraud. Clothing theft is one manifestation of organised crime.'

The organised nature of these ventures has also led to a proliferation of bogus outfits targeting doorstep donations. 'These are thieves who purport to be a charity, often using emotive leaflets and fake charity numbers to hoodwink people,' says Michael Lomotey, business manager of Clothes Aid - the largest commercial collector of clothing donations on behalf of charities. They may be even more brazen and pretend

to be well-known charities using fraudulent branding, or are using the guise of collecting as an excuse to steal genuine charity bags. 'We know there is an organised network behind these crimes because we are mapping the bogus companies and we see the same director connected to different companies,' he adds.

'Door-to-door collections are probably most affected, says Paul Ozanne, national recycling coordinator of the Salvation Army's trading company SATCol. He estimates a total of 2,000 tonnes of donations are stolen a year from the charity's 4,800 banks and 14 million household collections. 'It's not wise to advertise when you are collecting because they will come before you do.'

There have been many arrests. Last year Clothes Aid reported 300 incidents and had 200 arrests, but of these there were only three successful prosecutions. 'The most they got fined was £1,000. Other

thieves know that and are not even bothering to be bogus anymore, they just go out stealing,' says Lomotey. And, 'not being British nationals the thieves just leave the country before they are punished,' adds Matt George

### Lack of police action?

Charities have been critical of the police for not taking the problem seriously. 'Where we have secured prosecutions, most recently in 2010, the penalties have been so minor that they serve to actually encourage thieves, rather than deter them,' concurs Chenoweth-Casey.

However, charities are hopeful that a turning-point has now been reached after their lobbying for action secured the first meeting with civil society minister Nick Hurd, and the head of the City of London Police's economic crime directorate Steve Head, which took place in January.

One of the meeting's key outcomes will be the development of a national police strategy to tackle the gangs behind bogus charity clothing collections and raise awareness of the issues across the enforcement agencies.

Commenting on the strategy, Hurd says: 'This is a big problem that's been ignored for too long. Criminals who steal charity collection bags take millions of pounds away from good causes. Now they will face the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, headed by the City of London Police, as part of a new drive to clamp down on this cynical crime.'

### National response

Michael Lomotey, who attended the meeting, says: 'A national strategy will make a difference. It's an industry-wide initiative and it seems we are finally getting some movement. The police will be developing an operational strategy and we have a good idea of where the gangs are operating so we will be sharing our intelligence. The thieves need to be worried.'

But charities that rely heavily on clothing donations know they need to balance awareness raising of the problem with not deterring people from making donations.

The British Heart Foundation reports that the increasing trend in theft has already resulted in a 25 per cent drop in household collections, which equates to the loss of £3m this financial year and it is anticipating this will rise to £6m next year.

'There is a real risk that the public will be concerned about where the stock ends up and stop giving,' says Mike Lucas, BHF retail director.

### Charity fatigue

His fear is backed by a survey on public opinion of doorstep collection, carried out last year by online research company fast. MAP, which provides data to the Institute of Fundraising. The survey of 976 adults found only 3 per cent of households would donate if they knew the items were not benefiting a charity. Currently only 13 per cent of those surveyed never give anything.

Mixed up with the growing awareness of the theft problem is the perception among the public that there are too many charities asking for clothing donations, which is leading to charity fatigue. To counter this, some charities are calling for more transparency over where the profits from donations go, particularly when commercial operators are employed by charities to collect donations from banks and homes.

Matt George of Oxfam, which has its own textiles processing and collection operation, says: 'I get personally sick of constantly receiving plastic bags through my door stating that they will give £50-£100 per tonne to charity when the true value is £600 - £700 per tonne and the collection company is personally profiteering.' He adds that smaller charities that use collection companies may not be aware of the material's value and

should be commanding a higher percentage.

Chenoweth-Casey of Traid agrees that it is unfair for collectors to hide behind a charity's branding when the charity itself may only be receiving 5 per cent of the profits. She says: 'This is misleading to the public who expect the charity advertised on the bank to fully benefit from their donations. While these partnerships are legitimate, they are not transparent.' Traid also has its own processing facility and claims 100 per cent of its profits from donations go to its charitable aims.

Clothes Aid is one of the commercial companies that states on its promotional materials that between £50 and £100 of profits from donations go to its partner charity. Michael Lomotey says he backs the call for more transparency but argues that different methods of clothes collection incur different costs which are not simple to breakdown. 'It is crucial to understand that wherever commercial enterprises are involved there are costs.

Around 7 per cent of the profit from donations goes to Clothes Aid, the rest goes to the charity after costs are recovered for collecting and processing. For charities using a collector it is a risk-free investment. We raised £1.2 million for charities in the last year,' he says.

The Institute of Fundraising is developing a code of conduct for house-to-house collection that it says will introduce agreed standards on the information available to the public on how collections benefit charities.

In the mean time, the advice is not to stop donating clothes, but to check the credentials of the charity, check if there is a bag drop in the area and the legitimacy of collectors, or where possible, take clothing into charity shops. 'It is a two-way approach. Charities are keen that donors continue to trust them,' says Institute of Fundraising spokeswoman Diana Mackie.