AVOCADOS AND DEFORESTATION

AVOCADOS AND THE ECOSYSTEM



Every autumn, monarch butterflies travel up to 3,000 miles to overwinter in the mountains of Mexico. Most avocados sold in the United States come from this region, especially Michoacán, home of the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve.

More than 10 football fields of land per day of Mexican forests have been cleared for avocado production over the past decade. That includes 70,000 acres of pine-oak and fir forests that have been cleared or burned illegally for new orchards, threatening vital habitats like the Monarch Butterfly Biosphere Reserve. Despite its protection under Mexican law, more than 2,400 acres of the reserve have been converted into avocado plantations.

Eastern monarch populations have plummeted more than 90% over the past 20 years, and the population in 2024 was the second lowest ever recorded. Loss of overwintering habitat is devastating for the species.

Avocado expansion imperils not just monarchs, but also migratory songbirds and the unique wildlife living in the forests year-round. Habitat loss and intensive pesticide use endanger 10 species of threatened pollinators in Mexico, fragment migratory corridors for many species, and burn and fell forests that store vast amounts of carbon. Nearby logging for avocados makes habitat more vulnerable to drought, fires and storms.

THE HIGH COST OF 'GREEN GOLD'



Americans eat 3 billion pounds of avocados a year — an amount that's quadrupled over the past 20 years. Avocado production has become so lucrative that it's become known as "green gold," attracting organized crime and leading to water-hoarding and violence to Indigenous and other local communities. Community members, monarch butterfly defenders, and journalists who speak out to protect forests in Michoacán have been kidnapped, beaten, and even killed.

The avocado industry destroys forests and uses an enormous amount of water. It takes 18.5 gallons to produce just one avocado. The industry's water use takes an incredible toll on farms and villages in the drought-stricken region.

AVOCADOS AND FOOD WASTE

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, around one-third of the avocados purchased by Americans are never eaten.[1] Between 2019 and 2023, U.S. households wasted 4.5 billion pounds of avocados.

Americans discard 1 in every 3 bags' worth of groceries,[2] [3] and wasting high-impact food like avocados is particularly harmful because it also wastes all the wildlife, habitat, water, and resources that went into producing them.

SOLUTIONS THAT WORK

The Guardián Forestal Pro Forest Accountability (PFA) program is a voluntary, independent and science-based avocado certification in Mexico. It is the primary source for environmental due diligence, conflict-free sourcing, traceability, and continuous monitoring of agricultural supply chains. The Association of Avocado Exporting Producers and Packers of Mexico (APEAM) signed an agreement with the government committing to be deforestation-free by 2030. However, this industry-led program is facing delays and is vulnerable to potential corruption and lawsuits.

PFA exists now. It's an effective program that uses transparent, verifiable data to certify packinghouses and keep avocados from recently deforested land out of the supply chain. Within its first year, dozens of packinghouses had signed onto the program, and nearly 3,000 deforestation-linked orchards had been blocked from selling to them. The program has stopped 90% of deforestation-linked avocado exports to the United States.

To fully close the gap, and protect Mexico's forests and the monarch butterflies that need them, every packinghouse needs to get on board. To make that happen, they need the commitment of the U.S. market to keeping avocados and guacamole linked with deforestation off our tables.

THE ROLE OF U.S. SUPERMARKETS



Research from Climate Rights International has linked avocados from deforested land to importers that supply major U.S. grocery stores.[4] As the gateway between farms and plates, U.S. grocery stores must be part of the solution. These companies are a critical pipeline for avocados from Mexico and have enormous influence over packinghouses and importers.

A few companies have general anti-deforestation policies, but most of those policies haven't covered avocados. Too many lack transparency and accountability in their avocado supply chains and do not publicly commit to sourcing from supply chains that don't cause violence and deforestation in Mexico.[5]

Until every U.S. grocery store and retailer makes a public commitment, to require suppliers to source from PFA-certified packinghouses, avocados sourced from bloodshed and deforestation can still enter U.S. supply chains. Read our letter asking U.S. grocers to commit to PFA-certification.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Demand deforestation-free avocados. Tell U.S. grocery stores to adopt avocado-sourcing policies that protect human rights and monarch habitat. By also increasing sourcing of fair-trade, organic avocados, companies can lead the way toward sustainability and justice. Fair trade standards can protect forests and small producers.

Stay tuned for Center for Biological Diversity updates on our avocado work and our campaign to strengthen U.S. retailer commitments at TakeExtinctionOffYourPlate.com.

MORE RESOURCES

- *Unholy Guacamole: Deforestation, Water Capture, and Violence Behind Mexico's Avocado Exports to the U.S. and Other Major Markets* (Climate Rights International)
- *The New Republic: Superbowl Guac is Super Destructive. Some People Want to Fix That.*

REFERENCES

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[2]USDA. (n.d.). "Food Waste FAQs." https://www.usda.gov/about-food/food-safety/food-loss-and-waste/food-waste-faqs.
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[5] Guardian Forestal. (2026). "Proof of Forest Accountability." https://pfa.guardianforestal.org/.