

## Climate Change, Carbon Offsets and Certified Organic Forestry

Paull, J.<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*Carbon offset programs are creating a new breed of forester. These are retail carbon offsetters, who respond to opportunities to offset the carbon footprint of their lifestyle by paying for tree planting. This new cohort of de facto foresters act out of their green values and/or ecological awareness. However, since modern silviculture is chemically based, the obverse of their carbon offsetting, is pesticide onsetting - consequently their "solution" is at best dirty green. Forestry standards, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), Program for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), and Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), are all weak standards from the organics perspective, and they each allow synthetic pesticides and fertilizers.*

*The Stern Report (2006) addresses the economic implications of climate change on the basis that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) consensus of government scientists is correct, and as a mitigation strategy urges reducing our "carbon footprint." Planting trees is proposed as one option.*

*Forestry has thus become the prerogative of the everyday traveler. When purchasing an airline ticket there may be a carbon offsets option. Other things being equal, a flurry of tree planting would seem like a "good thing" - global forest loss over the past two centuries has been 30%, and deforestation proceeds at 7.3 million hectares per annum (Mygatt, 2006).*

*Modern forestry is chemical forestry. "Most of Australia's plantations are in blocks of uniform age and one species and are managed intensively to optimize yield" (Parsons et al., 2006). This is not synonymous with optimizing environmental outcome. Jenkin & Tomkins (2006) state: "it may be possible to conduct ... non-chemical pesticide forestry ... [but] in large scale industrial plantations ... application of chemical pesticides is required ... for controlling weeds, insects, fungi, nematodes and animals which adversely affect growth ... and the health of plantations." Chemicals used in Australian forestry operations: 25 herbicides, including atrazine and simazine, nine insecticides, two fungicides and seven classes of adjuvants, including surfactants, wetting agents and synthetic latex (Jenkin & Tomkins, 2006). In Australia, pesticides are mostly applied aerially, by plane or helicopter.*

*IFOAM previously rejected adopting an Organic Forestry Standard. Nevertheless, two certifiers have such standards: Debio and Naturland. Carbon offsetting is an opportunity for the organic sector to revisit the challenges and opportunities of Certified Organic Forestry.*

*With carbon offset programs offered at the retail level, it can only be a matter of time before there is a consumer blowback, as the realization dawns that carbon offsets can equal pesticide onsets. These customers having peeped behind the "green curtain," will have the right to feel duped, at not being made aware of this hidden trade-off.*

*There is the opportunity now to create clean green carbon offsetting programs, and the organic community can be in the vanguard of creating Certified Organic Forestry standards. This does not solve all the problematic issues with forestry, but it will address one major cause of forestry complaints worldwide - pesticides. Certified Organic Forestry standards can redefine world's best practice forestry, and create world's next practice forestry.*

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<sup>1</sup> The Fenner School of Environment and Society, College of Science, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia. E-mail: john.paull@anu.edu.au. Web: <http://www.anu.edu.au>