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Rainforest destruction

There must be more that we can do to halt and reverse the onslaught on the Amazon rainforest (Murder in the Amazon, 17 June). Hand-wringing on the sidelines is not going to impress the thuggish characters seemingly intent on destroying one of the major carbon sinks of our planet, and anyone who obstructs them in their mission.

What makes it so unforgivable is that Brazil's agricultural scientists have made such positive progress in converting the vast Cerrado savannah region into an immensely productive breadbasket. The Cerrado's millions of hectares were considered to be an unproductive wasteland until adverse soil conditions were corrected with lime and other amendments. Now the region is the powerhouse of Brazil's maize and soya export industry and, crucially, the pastures established for the cattle industry add further life to the inherently poor soils. The crops are mainly produced under no-till regimes, a further source of carbon sequestration and environmental protection. The Cerrado is also part of the global move towards ever-green agriculture as tree species are being incorporated into the crop and livestock systems.

This will take further pressure off the rainforest. And there are still millions of hectares awaiting development, so there is absolutely no need for the country to continue to destroy what is a global, rather than merely national, resource.

However, mankind's greed does not, it would seem, have many limits and while money can be made the forest will continue to be devastated and would be protectors like the Da Silva family will continue to be eliminated with impunity. We expected, and still hope for, a great deal from the new president, Dilma Rousseff, and it is incumbent upon us to register our concerns for the future of our collective planetary resource.

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