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FEATURED Q&A

Why Is Brazil Boosting Biofuels Production?



Brazil is pushing for new biofuels mandates in order to help comply with the reduction in carbon emission goals set in the Paris Agreement and to promote domestic fuel supply, João Paulo Botelho says below. // File Photo: Brazilian Government.

Q Brazil's government is considering the establishment of new biofuel mandates for fuel distributors, which would require distributors to acquire a set amount of 'certificates of emissions reductions' annually through the purchase of ethanol and biodiesel. At the same time, the country's agriculture minister is seeking to slap tariffs on imported ethanol following a surge of ethanol imports from the United States. However, state oil company Petrobras, which has been shedding biofuels assets, has expressed concerns about the impact of increased biofuel output on food production and forest conservation. What is behind the government's efforts to boost biofuels production in Brazil, and who will be the winners and losers from such moves? What is at the root of Petrobras' opposition to the proposed mandates? What impact would the proposed biofuels mandates have on the environment?

A Mark S. Langevin, director of the Brazil Initiative and research professor at the Elliott School of International Affairs at The George Washington University: "The Temer government is responding to a fermenting policy brew. It stirs up the Lava Jato corruption scandal, the promise to revive the São Paulo-based ethanol industry advanced by Senator Aécio Neves of the PSDB party during the 2014 presidential election, and finally, the dramatic fall in oil prices. The United States crop insurance programs that boost corn production and ethanol exports also contribute to the ferment by challenging Brazil's debt-laden ethanol sector. As a policy response, Temer is moving forward with the RenovaBio program that seeks to double production of

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Argentina Sees More Investment at Vaca Muerta

The government has been working to overhaul its energy sector since President Mauricio Macri took office in 2015.

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Sempra Reports Strong Quarter on Mexico Results

San Diego-based utility Sempra Energy said positive results from its Mexico business helped the company post its strongest first-quarter performance since it was formed in 1998.

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OIL & GAS

Petrobras, Exxon Said to Be In Talks for Partnership

Carla Lacerda, Exxon's Brazil country chief, said earlier this month that the company sees great opportunities in the country. Last week, Petrobras CEO Pedro Parente met in Houston with Lacerda, according to people familiar with the conversations.

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Lacerda // File Photo: Brazil-Texas Chamber of Commerce.

OIL & GAS SECTOR NEWS

Argentina Expects Increased Investment at Vaca Muerta

Oil and gas companies will be investing \$15 billion per year in unconventional energy sources in Argentina by 2020, Energy Minister Juan José Aranguren said Tuesday, The Wall Street Journal reported. Currently, state oil and gas company YPF and other oil companies, such as

“The current investment level is not a true reflection of where investment will be in a few years.”

— Andrew Brown

Chevron, are investing approximately \$1 billion per year at the Vaca Muerta shale formation, Aranguren said. The government has been working to overhaul its energy sector since President Mauricio Macri took office in 2015 by loosening price controls and subsidies. “One of our goals is to totally deregulate the system,” said Aranguren, who was president of Shell Argentina before Macri appointed him to his administration. Though most investors in Vaca Muerta are still in the early stages of gauging the viability of the formation’s wells, companies could soon ramp up production, according to the head of exploration and production at Royal Dutch Shell, Andrew Brown. “When we start, it’s very much about drilling a few wells in each area and seeing how they perform over a year or two ... when we know where the sweet spots are, you go into harvest mode and we’ve done that in Permian. So the current investment level is not a true reflection of where investment will be in a few years.” Aranguren has faced push-back within his ministry over the pace at which the government is pushing to attract investment to its oil and gas sector. Last month, top

oil-and-gas advisor Jose Luís Sureda resigned, saying Argentina lacks the necessary infrastructure and services industry to attract and handle a dramatic increase in investment over such a short period of time. Despite the push-back, the government is continuing to pursue its goal of increasing renewable energy output to 20 percent of total energy generation by the end of 2025. The government will also likely hold energy auctions this year and next year for offshore exploration, Aranguren said.

Mexico Dispatches Federal Troops to Quell Unrest Over Oil Theft

More than 2,000 federal soldiers have been dispatched to the Mexican state of Puebla to quell unrest related to a crackdown on oil theft, Cinequo reported Monday. Last week, gunmen opened fire on army patrols investigating pipeline thefts, leading to the deaths of four soldiers and six assailants. Several more deaths were reported over the weekend



Peña Nieto // File Photo: Mexican Government.

when gunfire broke out between authorities and suspected fuel smugglers in an ambush. On Sunday, local firefighters were working to put out a blaze at a pipeline in the town of Nenetzintla, where the clashes had occurred, the Associated Press reported. Local police have detained scores of villagers suspected of helping fuel thieves, long considered to be associated with drug cartels and organized crime. Puebla is one of the Mexican states with the highest incidences of hydrocarbon theft, according to the report. A long-standing

NEWS BRIEFS

Petrobras, Exxon Said to Be Discussing Partnership

U.S. multinational oil company Exxon Mobil and Brazilian state-run oil company Petrobras have discussed the possibility of a strategic partnership, according to people familiar with the talks, Bloomberg News reported Tuesday. The deal would give Exxon access to Brazil’s oil fields and infrastructure while Brazil could take advantage of Exxon’s production, refining and distribution expertise. Carla Lacerda, Exxon’s Brazil country chief, said earlier this month that the company sees great opportunities in the country. Last week, Petrobras CEO Pedro Parente met in Houston with Lacerda and BP Plc’s head of Latin America. Petrobras said in a statement Tuesday there is no ongoing negotiation to form a strategic alliance with Exxon.

Petroperú Eyes Canada’s Pacific Exploration As Partner on Idle Bloc

Peruvian state oil company Petroperú and Canada’s Pacific Exploration & Production Corp. are considering a partnership to develop a dormant oilfield in Peru’s Amazon region, Reuters reported May 5. Oil lot 192 near Peru’s border with Ecuador has been idle since last year, due to pipeline ruptures. “Pacific will not make larger investments if they don’t see a possibility of extending the term. But if we participate ... the situation would change and they would begin to make investments,” Petroperú Chief Executive Luis García Rosell told journalists.

Venezuelan Oil Exports to U.S. Bounce Back in April

Venezuela’s crude oil sales to the United States recovered in April, reaching their highest level since November of 741,000 barrels per day, due to an increased supply of diluted and upgrade oil, Reuters reported Wednesday. The United States imported 42 cargoes of Venezuelan crude last month.

problem, authorities this year have been trying to crack down on illegal pipeline thefts that cost Mexican state oil company Pemex about \$1.5 billion a year. An estimated 27,000 barrels per day of gasoline and diesel is being stolen by way of pipelines as the smugglers siphon the fuel to sell it at lower prices than Pemex gas stations, which have sharply raised prices this year, leading to violent protests around the country and growing animosity among the poor against the government of Enrique Peña Nieto. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the April 21 edition of the Energy Advisor.]

POWER SECTOR NEWS

Sempra Reports Strong Quarter on Mexico Results

San Diego-based utility Sempra Energy on Tuesday said positive results from its Mexico business helped the company post its strongest first-quarter performance since it was formed in 1998, the San Diego Union-Tribune reported. In its Sempra Mexico division, the company posted a \$30 million improvement, as

Sempra saw its strongest first quarter results ever, due to strong performance of its Mexico business.

compared to the first quarter last year, thanks in part to deferred tax expenses and earnings from the acquisitions late last year of the Venti-ka wind farm complex and state oil company Pemex's stake in the Gasoductos de Chihuahua joint venture. Overall, Sempra reported earnings of \$441 million in the quarter ending March 31, a 25 percent increase from last year. Revenue rose to \$3.03 billion from \$2.6 billion, beating the market estimates. Tuesday's earnings report came six weeks after Sempra's subsidiary in Mexico, IEnova, signed a 20-year

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biofuels by 2030 through the establishment of 'certificates of emissions reductions' that would likely increase sales to fuel distributors, to the detriment of gasoline, while also creating a secondary market for these certificates in parallel with the California and European markets. Yet, low oil prices and mounting U.S. ethanol imports since November of last year inflame transportation fuel policymaking in Brasília. Brazilian ethanol producers now push for a 16 to 20 percent tariff and a minimum national stock mandate to curb U.S. imports. These protections will draw the ire of the U.S. biofuels industry and government, but would also intensify scrutiny of the U.S. farm bill and efforts to expand corn producer subsidies. These short-term policy fixes, whether in the form of protection or subsidies, do little to advance the Paris Agreement and greenhouse gas reductions. The RenovaBio program promises to place ethanol and biodiesel on a sustainable development and production path, and could lead to further innovations in this value chain. All good, but the future of sustainable biofuel development that also lifts food production is anchored to greater multilateral cooperation, as well as U.S.-Brazil bilateral collaboration, which leads to a regional transportation fuel market capable of reducing carbon emissions while also financing sustainable agriculture in the face of the devastating consequences posed by climate change."

A **Moira Birss, communications and media manager at Amazon Watch:** "Members and allies of Brazil's agribusiness industry, known as ruralistas, dominate the country's Congress and the administration of President Michel Temer. Facing competition from increased ethanol imports and a record soybean harvest this year (the majority of domestic biodiesel is made with soybeans), the ruralistas have, presumably, asked the administration for help via a biodiesel import

tariff. The emissions reductions mandate, for its part, is likely an attempt by the government to greenwash the tariff. After all, Amazon rainforest deforestation rates went up 29 percent last year after several years of reduction, to much applause from the international community. Soybean farming is one of the industries contributing to the Amazon's deforestation, and planned industrial transport corridors used to ship soybeans to market will themselves have significant deforestation impacts. Furthermore, the Temer administration is under increasing fire for its ongoing onslaught against environmental protections and the rights of indigenous peoples, whom multiple domestic and international studies have shown are the best protectors of forests like the Amazon. The current onslaught includes slashing the Environment Ministry's already-meager budget by more than 50 percent and the indigenous agency's budget by 40 percent, reducing several Amazon conservation areas, appointing anti-indigenous former ruralista Congressman Osmar Serraglio to the key land rights post of justice minister, and working to open up already-titled indigenous territories to massive mining and dam projects. While Petrobras' concerns are, on the surface, laudatory, it is not a stretch to assume that they arise from a concern for the company's bottom line if a greater percentage of biodiesel must be mixed with diesel."

A **João Paulo Botelho, senior market intelligence analyst for sugar and ethanol at INTL FCStone – Brazil:** "There are two main reasons behind the government push to introduce the new biofuels mandates. The first is to comply with the reduction in carbon emission goals set in the Paris Agreement. The second is to promote a domestic fuel supply that would guarantee the volumes needed to match domestic demand for coming decades. This last concern has gained importance in the last couple of

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power-purchase agreement for a 110-megawatt photo-voltaic solar project in northwestern Mexico. Called the Pima Solar project, it is expected to be completed in the fourth quarter of 2018 at a cost of roughly \$115 million. Sempra is also exploring opportunities in South America and is considering investing in a pipeline project in Peru, according to the report. Mexico's government is in the process of liberalizing its energy sector amid declining production. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the April 21 issue of the weekly Energy Advisor.]

POLITICAL NEWS

Brazil's Lula Calls Trial a 'Farce' in Five-Hour Testimony

Former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva called the corruption case against him "illegitimate" and a "farce" during five hours of testimony Wednesday in his first appearance before a judge who has overseen the massive graft case revolving around state oil company Petrobras, Reuters reported. Lula is accused of receiving a beach apartment in exchange for helping construction company OAS to win contracts from the government. He has repeatedly denied ownership of the property and reiterated

“I want to say, clearly, that I want to be president again.”

— Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva

that denial during his testimony Wednesday before Judge Sérgio Moro. Lula pounded his fist and documents on a table and told Moro that prosecutors had not produced any evidence against him. "When I became president in 2003, I made a faithful promise. I was aware that I could never do wrong," said Lula. "If I did wrong, the workers' class would never again vote for somebody from a lower level." Lula

THE DIALOGUE CONTINUES

Will Trump Cut U.S. Funding for Project Finance?

Q **Despite high levels of interest from multilateral and commercial lenders for project finance for infrastructure and energy projects in Latin America over the last year, uncertainty surrounding U.S. policies under President Donald Trump has raised concerns about a potential decrease in U.S. funding for multilateral lenders, including from World Bank President Jim Yong Kim, Bloomberg News reported last month. Is it likely that the United States will cut funding that would normally go to project finance in Latin America and the Caribbean? How will multilateral lending institutions that receive funding from the United States respond, if U.S. funding under the Trump administration dries up? Would non-U.S. players step up if the United States decides to scale back? How would Latin America's energy sector be affected by a potential change in funding sources for projects?**

A **Norman F. Anderson, president and CEO of CG/LA Infrastructure:** "First, the problem with Latin American infrastructure is not financing, but a lack of bankable projects; the region is not creating a pipeline of priority projects. Second, the multilateral development banks (MDBs) have been lending less and less to infrastructure in the region over the last five years. They know this, and they should have shared this information more generally—this is the canary in the coal mine. My third point comes from Jim Collins, who wrote 'Good to Great.' He said the organizing principal for business is increasingly not the large corporate institution, but people's individual networks. It is the highly networked who are the most successful—and the most highly competent

networked people (in expertise, reputation and connections) are the most influential professionals. The numbers in this latter category are growing exponentially. What does this mean for infrastructure, the MDBs and the effects of what the Trump administration may or may not do? Public executives who are initiating or managing infrastructure projects need ready access to networks of expertise. This means that the public sector—federal, state, even municipal—needs to become more vigorous, more powerful, more capable, but not larger. The MDBs need to facilitate that process. They need to restructure themselves to focus more on enhancing the knowledge and connectivity of the people they are trying to help. President Trump and the budgetary decisions of the Trump administration are deeply irrelevant to this conversation. The biggest challenge to infrastructure, by far, is the corruption issue, and the absolute destruction that it has caused to the reputation of infrastructure investment in the region. The infrastructure of infrastructure, already in tatters by years of ongoing scandals, has been obliterated by the Odebrecht scandals. President Trump has no influence over whether or not the region will create a pipeline of real projects, or re-create an infrastructure model that works, or re-vitalize the reputation of an entire, strategically critical, industry. In this moment of historic change—fast globalization, exploding technology, new public sector responsibilities—Latin America needs to chart its own strong, self-confident, vision."

EDITOR'S NOTE: More [commentary](#) on this topic appeared in the May 5 issue of the Latin America Energy Advisor.

NEWS BRIEFS

Death Toll Nears 40 in Venezuela's Anti-Government Protests

A 27-year-old man was killed and dozens of others were injured Wednesday as violent clashes continued in Venezuela, CBS News reported. The death toll in more than a month of protests reached at least 39. National Guard troops launched tear gas at protesters demanding elections, and pro-government militiamen harassed protesters as they attempted to march to the Supreme Court. Anti-government protesters also hurled bottles and bags containing excrement at security forces. At least 93 people were injured Wednesday.

Chile Begins Selling Cannabis-Based Medicines in Pharmacies

Chile has become the first Latin American country to sell cannabis-based medicines in its pharmacies, the Associated Press reported Wednesday. The program launched Wednesday at two pharmacies in Santiago, which will sell T100 and TC100, chronic pain-relief medications that are made in Canada. The program to sell the drugs is financed by an alliance between Chile's Alef Biotechnology and Canada's Tilray, and is under the supervision of the Chilean National Health Institute.

Migrant Apprehensions on U.S.-Mexico Border Fall to 17-Year Lows in April

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection service said Tuesday that apprehensions at the U.S. border with Mexico have reached new lows, CNN reported. The number of people stopped from illegally crossing the border was down about 9 percent in April as compared to the month before, the lowest in 17 years of available data. Apprehensions in April were down 62 percent as compared to the same month last year.

also told the judge that the case against him would not stop him from again running for the nation's highest office. "I want to say, clearly, that I want to be president again," said Lula, The Wall Street Journal reported. If convicted, Lula would be barred from running for office. Lula also railed against the media, saying it has "massacred" his character and "wants to get me dead or alive," Reuters reported. Moro told the former president that he would be judged on the evidence in the case. "The press has no role in this case whatsoever," Moro told Lula. "The judgment will be made on the basis of law and exclusively according to the proof presented." Moro is not expected to rule on Lula's case before July, Reuters reported. Lula is charged in four other cases connected to the Petrobras corruption case, known as "Operation Car Wash," and has repeatedly denied wrongdoing.

Mexico Criticizes New U.S. Law Against Sanctuary Cities

Mexico's Foreign Ministry on Monday criticized a new "sanctuary cities" law in Texas, known as SB4, that requires local police to help enforce U.S. immigration laws, the Associated Press reported. "The Foreign Ministry expresses its concern regarding SB4 because it contains elements that could be harmful to the rights of Mexican and Mexican-born persons living in that state, who account for about one-third of its total population," the statement said. The law requires local police chiefs and sheriffs, under the threat of jail and removal from office, to comply with federal requests to hold criminal suspects in jail for possible deportation. Police officials worry the measure will discourage immigrant families from reporting crimes or coming forward as witnesses over fears that talking to local police could lead their deportation. Critics also fear it will lead to racial profiling. In McAllen, Tex., scores of demonstrators took to the streets near the Mexican border in protest of the measure, local television station KENS reported. Governor Greg Abbott (R) said Monday in an announcement that public safety was his top priority in signing the bill into law.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Cuba Could See Two Million U.S. Visitors Annually: Report

Some two million U.S. travelers could be visiting Cuba annually by 2025, up from 285,000 last year, representing a "huge" opportunity for U.S.-based airlines, hotel companies and cruise lines, Boston Consulting Group said in a report released Wednesday, Reuters reported. Although the opportunities are promising, U.S. companies will see challenges operating in the centrally planned economy, according to the report. "The reality is that U.S. travel to Cuba is in its nascent stages, and all the players are still learning how to make it work," the report said. "Success, as with most things Cuban, will require unusual—and often unorthodox—approaches." Cuba's government is aiming to double hotel capacity by 2030. So far, Starwood is the only U.S. hotel company operating in the communist country. In its report, Boston Consulting Group did not address uncertainties surrounding U.S. President Donald Trump, who has threatened to reverse the thaw started by his predecessor, former President Barack Obama.

Venezuela Releases Alarming New Health Data After Lapse

After a nearly two-year lapse in reporting data, Venezuela's health ministry on Tuesday released public health figures that painted a grim picture, with infant mortality jumping 30 percent and maternal mortality up 66 percent, The Wall Street Journal reported. The health and mortality statistics were published this week in the government's most recent epidemiological bulletin and reflect the period ending December 2016. The latest data also showed an increase in preventable diseases, such as diphtheria and malaria, amid a shortage of repellent and vaccinations. Food shortages have also increased health problems related to malnutrition.

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years, due to the stagnation in ethanol production capacity and the rise in gasoline and diesel imports, even though oil production is on the rise. In this sense, a clear and long-term commitment to biofuels would likely lead to new investments within the sector, boosting domestic growth, jobs and energy independence. This renewed interest in the biofuel sector would probably have a large influence on the country's overall carbon emissions, even considering that Brazil already uses more renewable energy than most countries. On top of the larger share that conventional ethanol and biodiesel would gain in the domestic market, the new policy would incentivize companies to adopt more eco-friendly practices and be more concerned about their operations' carbon footprint. The development of new technologies for second- and third-generation biofuels would also benefit greatly from this new regulatory framework. Although Petrobras has denied opposing the proposed policy, the company has harshly criticized some of the new instruments, indicating concern over its effects on the Brazilian fuel market. These remarks can only be understood by analyzing the company's shift in focus over the last couple of years. Since the corruption scandal and oil price decline left the company in a crisis, the new management's decision was to focus its attention on core fossil fuel assets, divesting from the biofuel sector. In this scenario, the bottom line of the company would probably be hurt if the government heavily incentivizes the increase in biofuel's share of the domestic market."

A **Leticia Phillips, North America representative for the Brazilian Sugarcane Industry Association (UNICA):** "Brazil is the second-largest producer of ethanol in the world, only behind the United States, producing around 7 billion gallons of sugar cane ethanol per year. Besides ethanol, Brazil is the largest producer and exporter of sugar in the world, and we use our cane bagasse and leaves to produce bioelectricity

to power our mills and to be used by the Brazilian electrical grid. We do this using only 1.5 percent of Brazil's arable land. The sustainability of Brazilian sugar cane ethanol is indisputable. Our fuel achieves among the highest greenhouse gas emission savings of all biofuels produced at scale: at least 61 percent when compared to gasoline, as per the environmental protection agency's own analysis. Sugar cane is a crop that only needs to be replanted every six years, reducing the need of tilling the land and releasing carbon dioxide. Since the beginning of the ethanol program in Brazil, more than 600 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions have been avoided, so it is easy to understand why there is a push for using more sugar cane ethanol in Brazil. In the last 20 years, the volume of sugar cane harvested and processed in Brazil has almost tripled to meet rising demand for sugar cane ethanol and bioelectricity. During that time, there has been no drop in Brazilian food production. Our environment is also protected. Since 2009, there has been an Agro-ecological Zoning (AEZ) for sugar cane in Brazil, which prohibits sugar cane expansion or new ethanol production facilities from occurring in sensitive ecosystems like the Amazon, the Pantanal wetlands and Upper Paraguay River basin. The AEZ also establishes authorized areas for the cultivation of sugar cane, equivalent to 7.5 percent of the Brazilian territory. Using a sustainable and advanced biofuel like sugar cane ethanol to power cars in Brazil, and around the world, is a win-win solution, and other countries should follow Brazil's example and replicate. By adding this low-carbon biofuel to gasoline or flex-fuel car tanks, the world can find a solution for the challenge of climate change, while protecting the environment and the health of its population, without any threat of food security."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can contact editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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