

The agricultural traders of the Lake Geneva region

*Dr Alexander Ressos, TEP
Attorney-at-Law (Switzerland), Solicitor (Hong Kong),
Solicitor (England & Wales)*

Agricultural trading has its own geography, which extends beyond the canton of Geneva. Cargill settled in Geneva in 1956, but several large traders in grains, oilseeds, sugar, coffee and cocoa have chosen the Vaud shores of Lake Geneva, between Nyon, Rolle, Morges and Lausanne, for reasons of Vaud taxation, the availability of office space and quality of life, while using the banks, inspectors, charterers and lawyers of Geneva.¹ The Lake Geneva region thus forms a single cluster for agricultural trading, in which the Geneva part provides the services and the Vaud part a share of the operational headquarters, and whose components the cantonal statistics artificially separate.

Agricultural trading differs from energy trading in its thinner margins, its considerable volumes, its dependence on harvests and agricultural policies, and its relationships with millions of producers, cooperatives and intermediaries in the countries of origin. The questions of sustainability, deforestation, child labour and farmers' incomes, which Part I examines for African cocoa, coffee and cotton, arise there with particular acuteness. The agricultural traders have therefore developed traceability and certification programmes that the energy traders have not had to devise. The European regulation on deforestation-free products, whose application has been postponed several times, reaches these houses through their European customers.²

1 Notes

1. Wikipedia (en), art. "ECOM Agroindustrial": headquartered in Pully; Le Temps, 10 June 2023 (Archer Daniels Midland in Rolle); by contrast, Cargill ("Cargill en Suisse", cargill.com: active in Switzerland since 1956, more than 350 people at the Geneva headquarters, from which the trading of grains and oilseeds is conducted) and COFCO

The agricultural traders of the Lake Geneva region

International (“Headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland”, cofcointernational.com) are established in the canton of Geneva. ↩

2. Regulation (EU) 2023/1115 on deforestation-free products, whose application has been postponed to 30 December 2026 for large companies and to 30 June 2027 for small ones; Deloitte Société d’Avocats, “Règlement Déforestation : un nouveau report pour fin 2026”, blog.avocats.deloitte.fr (accessed September 2026). ↩

For general information only. This article does not constitute legal or tax advice, does not replace advice on an individual case and creates no lawyer-client relationship. It reflects the legal position as of September 2026.

Online version: helveticaregister.com/geneva-the-agricultural-traders-of-the-lake-geneva-region