

# Amazon Land Conflict



Welcome to the Amazon rainforest, an enormous beautiful tropical rainforest in which lies around 50 per cent of the world's animal species, an amazing wet and warm place perfect for plants. The rainforest seems timeless, yet it is changing rapidly. For thousands of years, small groups of indigenous peoples have made their home here, making a living by hunting and gathering. In more recent times, other groups have come to the rainforest, including rubber tappers, farmers, cattle ranchers, and loggers. In addition, the rainforest is of great interest to environmental groups, which are organizations that work to protect the natural world.

Each of these groups has its own ideas about the Amazon rainforest. The rubber tappers, farmers, cattle ranchers, and loggers want to use the rainforest to make a living. Indigenous peoples want to maintain their traditional way of life. Environmental groups want to preserve the rainforest in its natural state. These differences have led to land use conflict, or arguments about the best ways to use the land.



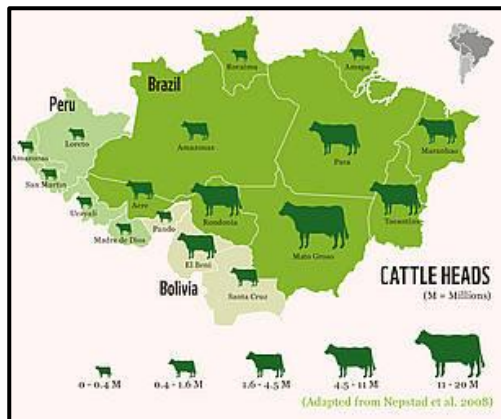
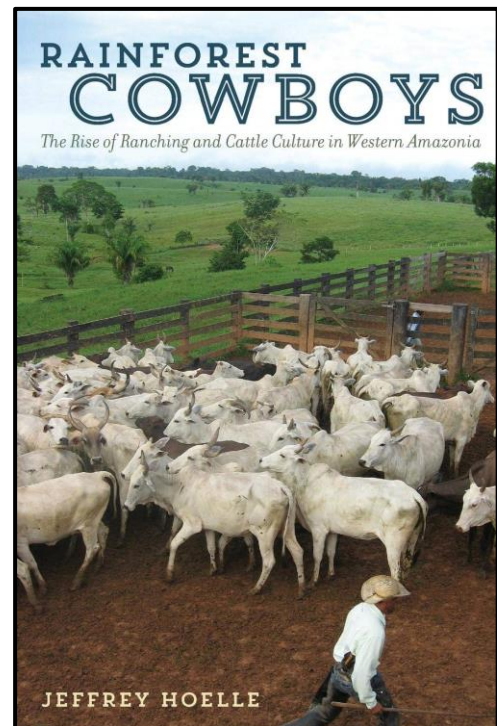
# Cattle Ranchers



Cattle ranching is now one of the main causes of deforestation in the rainforest. Ranchers say they are raising food for the world. And many countries are happy to buy Brazilian beef. A rainforest may not seem like it could be cattle country, but since the 1960s parts of the Amazon basin have become just that. Although the Amazon cattle ranchers are a small group, they own large areas of rainforest land. Rainforest cattle graze primarily on grass. They consume the grass in an area all the way down to the dirt, and then they are moved to a new area with fresh grass to eat. Moving cattle from place to place gives grazed areas an opportunity to grow new grass, but this practice also uses up a lot of land. After large tracts of rainforest are cleared, the trees seldom grow back. Instead, the cleared areas become grasslands.

This permanent deforestation upsets many people, but it is of great benefit to ranchers. Many people argue that cattle don't belong in a rainforest. Cattle ranchers strongly disagree, arguing that they are making good use of rainforest land by raising food for the world and earning income for Brazil.

Many countries import beef from Brazil. In fact, the United States is one of the biggest buyers of Brazilian beef. Some environmental groups are dissatisfied with this trade. They estimate that 55 square feet of rainforest have to be cleared for every hamburger that is sold in the United States. In 2008, the value of beef that was exported to other countries was in excess of \$3 billion. The government of Brazil can use the money that is earned from beef sales to help pay its debts and to care for its citizens.





## Environmentalists



Not all Brazilians want to see the Amazon basin developed. For example, environmental groups have worked for many years to attempt to slow the clearing of the rainforest. Their ideas have led to conflict with many other groups. Experts estimate that we are losing over 100 plant, animal, and insect species every day to rainforest deforestation. Some of these species haven't even been discovered yet! Scientists and environmentalists began coming to the rainforest in the 1970s. Some came to study rainforest plants, hoping to find plants that could cure diseases. Others came to study rainforest animals. Still others came to work with native peoples. All of these groups want to protect the rainforest and its biodiversity. Scientists estimate that a 2.5-acre patch of rainforest contains about 750 species of trees and 1,500 species of flowering plants. The same patch is also home to approximately 125 species of mammals and 400 species of birds. And these numbers include only the plants and animals that scientists already know about. Countless unknown species also make their homes in the rainforest.

Environmental groups argue that all rainforest species have a right to exist, which means their rainforest home must be preserved. Environmentalists therefore want to slow down development of the rainforest. This would give scientists time to study the effects of new activities so that better decisions can be made for the future.

In 2000, environmental groups won a major victory against ranchers. They were able to block a law that would have allowed ranchers to clear rainforest land with no restrictions. Another victory came in 2004, when Brazil's government created two large rainforest reserves. Only sustainable activities like rubber tapping are allowed in these areas. In 2008, Brazil's leaders set up a \$21 billion fund for conservation and sustainable development in the Amazon.

## Native Amazonians



Once there were as many as 10 million native people living in the Amazon rainforest, but today the number of native Amazonians is much smaller. Those who remain want one thing above all, to continue their traditional way of life. Natives have lived a sustainable way of life in the rainforest for about 12,000 years. Many live as they always have, by hunting, fishing, and growing crops on small plots of land that they have cleared in the forest. When a field is no longer fertile, they clear a new field somewhere else. Over time, new forest covers the old field. This is a sustainable way of life that is using the resources of the Amazon rainforest without causing long-term damage. In the 1960s, the government of Brazil decided that it would open the Amazon basin to development.

The government began by building a highway, which farmers, ranchers, and loggers followed into the Amazon region. The arrival of so many newcomers has hurt native Amazonians. Many of the native people have been driven from their homelands in order to make room for farms and ranches. Some of them have died from diseases brought by newcomers. Other native people have been killed or injured in land use conflicts. Native groups have called on the Brazilian government to make them the legal owners of their homelands.

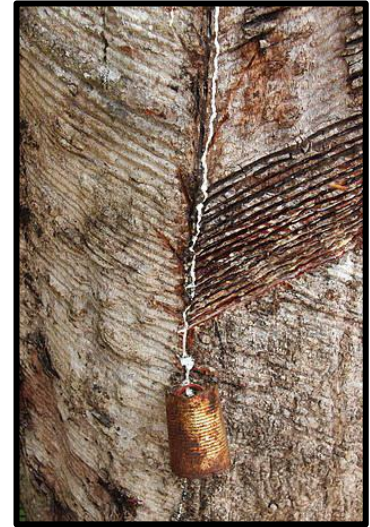


*The image to the left was taken by a pilot who flew over and found an unknown tribe of the deep Amazon. It is thought that this is the first image of the tribe and their first encounter with non-natives.*





## Rubber Tappers



Rubber tappers have lived in the Amazon basin for many generations. These workers “tap,” or collect, the sap from rubber trees that grow in the rainforest. The sap is then dried to make rubber products such as erasers or tires for cars and bikes. Rubber Tapping Does Not Hurt the Forest. Rubber tappers first came to the Amazon region during the 1870s, when they were hired to work on rubber tree plantations in the rainforest. When the price of rubber dropped, most of the plantations were abandoned. However, some of the rubber tappers decided to stay in the region and continue making their living in the rainforest.

Rubber tappers remove sap from a rubber tree by making diagonal cuts in the bark and then collecting the sap in cups. Removing the sap in this way does not harm the tree, which makes rubber tapping a sustainable activity. Rubber tapping is one way to use the resources of the rainforest without harming the environment.

Rubber tappers believe that their right to the rainforest comes from having worked there for so long. They also argue that their way of life does not harm the rainforest. For this reason, they believe, the government should protect their activities.





## Loggers



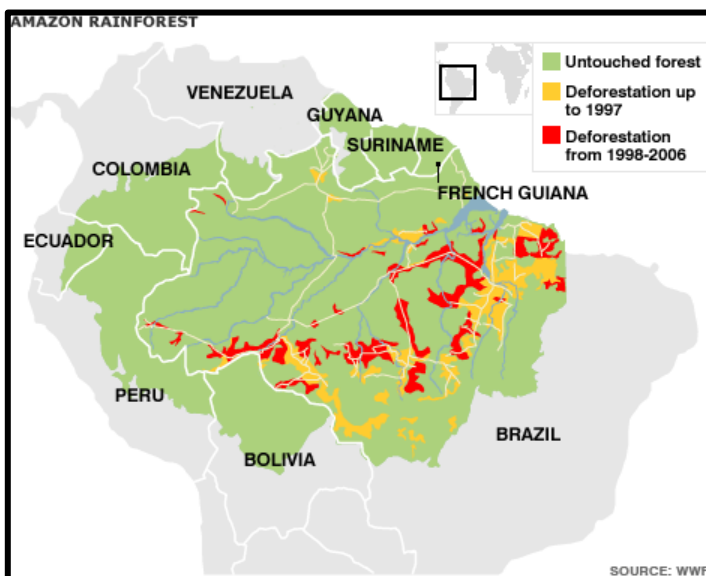
Logging companies began moving into the Amazon basin during the 1960s. Loggers harvest trees from forests for use in wood products, which range from paper to fine furniture. A great variety of tree species grows throughout the Amazon rainforest. The most valuable species are the hardwood trees, such as mahogany and rosewood.

Furniture manufacturers all over the world appreciate the beautiful wood from these trees.

Unfortunately, these valuable trees are scattered throughout the rainforest, making it difficult to find and cut only the hardwoods. Instead, loggers clear-cut whole patches of rainforest, which means that they cut down all of the trees in an area. After all of the trees have been removed, the loggers move on to another patch.

The logging companies argue that clear-cutting is the only way they can make money, but clear-cutting is also a leading cause of deforestation. The larger the area that is stripped of its trees, the longer it takes for the rainforest to grow back, if it does.

Many groups oppose the clear-cutting of the rainforest. Loggers reply that they are helping Brazil's economy grow by creating jobs for people in the forestry industry. In addition, logging provides wood for Brazil's furniture factories and paper mills. In 2005, Brazil exported more than \$5 billion worth of wood. The money earned from these sales is helping Brazil to pay off its debts to other countries and is improving the living conditions of many of its citizens.





# Settlers



During the 1960s, the government of Brazil began to encourage poor people to move into the Amazon rainforest. These new settlers arrived in large numbers, looking for rainforest land to farm. The plan hoped to reduce the dependent poor from large urban areas by making them self-sufficient in farming. Although the intentions were good for the economy, the unintended consequences to the rainforest proved to have many more problems.

Brazil is a vast country, but it has limited areas of farmland. Furthermore, this farmland is not shared equally. A few wealthy families have long owned most of the best farmland, whereas millions of poor Brazilians own no land at all. For many families in Brazil, the prospect of owning a farm in the Amazon basin had seemed like a distant dream but farming in this environment is not easy. The constant rain washes away the soil's poor nutrients. Tropical insects also kill many crops. However, the settlers' dream has become a nightmare for many farm families. Brazilian settlers cannot relocate as easily as the native Amazonians. As more settlers have cleared land for farming, opposition to settlers has grown.

