ISSUES TODAY

What should be done about the rain forest?

The Amazon Rain Forest, the largest in the world, is shrinking. It contains the widest variety of plant and animal life on Earth and is important to the continent's economy.

In recent years about 10,000 square miles (26 000 square kilometers) of forest in Brazil have been deforested annually. Should deforestation be allowed to continue? There are many perspectives on this issue. Here are two of them.

TROPICAL RAIN FOREST

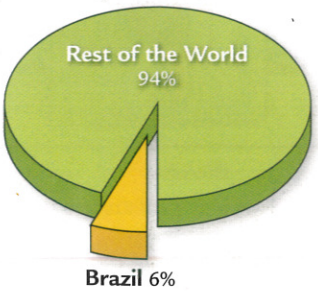
Rain forest today

Deforested area

Deforestation has a disastrous impact on the environment.

- Trees and plants in the rain forest absorb greenhouse gases. Deforestation, on the other hand, contributes to global warming. Brazil emits more greenhouse gases than any other country in South America.
- About 140 species disappear from rain forests every day due to deforestation.
- Deforestation could destroy species with potential cures for diseases. About 25 percent of modern medicines were developed from rain forest plants. Less than 1 percent of rain forest species, however, have been tested for medical value.
- Deforestation displaces the indigenous people who have lived in the rain forest for centuries. Today about 350,000 indigenous people live in Brazil.
- Harvesting products—including fruits, nuts, and medicinal plants—often earns 40 times as much money per acre as deforested cattle ranches do.

LAND AREA



CARBON DIOXIDE
from land use change

When land is deforested, carbon dioxide levels rise. Brazil contributes a disproportionate share of this pollutant. Carbon dioxide, ozone, and methane are all greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming.

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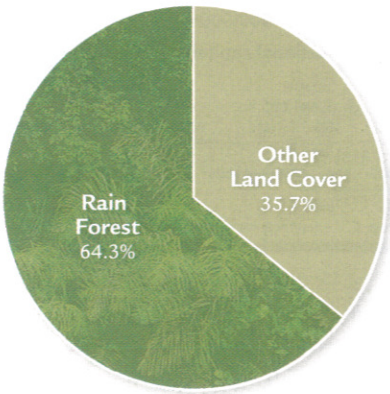
Deforestation is necessary for the economy.

- About 60 percent of all arable land in Brazil is unused. Deforestation allows the country to utilize more of its land.
- Deforestation is an indicator of Brazil's economy. When the economy is growing, ranchers expand their pastures, the government builds highways, and deforestation increases.
- Brazil has an external debt of over US$200 billion. Money generated from major exports such as timber and coffee provides a fast way for Brazil to repay foreign governments and banks.
- Subsistence farmers depend on forest products for their livelihoods.
- Attempts to "save the earth" place an unfair burden on South Americans who could be prohibited from using about two-fifths of their own land. Other countries, such as the United States, have already cleared 90 percent of their original forests.

BRAZIL'S LAND COVER



Rain forest in Brazil occupies over 2 million square miles (5.5 million square kilometers). This rain forest is roughly eight times the size of Texas.