



Information Sheet:

THE AMAZON RAINFOREST

The Amazon rainforest in South America is the world's largest tropical rainforest. It is home to around 10% of all species on Earth. Rainforests like the Amazon are natural systems – they regulate the climate, cycle water and support the conditions that make land productive. They are also areas of high **biodiversity**: a huge variety of living things, from insects and birds to mammals and plants, all depending on each other to survive.

Large areas of the Amazon are being cleared to make way for farming. One of the main causes is **cattle ranching** – clearing forest so that cattle can graze on the land. Forest is also cleared to grow soya beans, which are used as animal feed. In Brazil alone, the equivalent of 5.6 million acres of land grows soya beans to feed animals raised in Europe. This means that decisions made by consumers thousands of miles away are directly connected to what happens to forests in South America.

When a forest is cleared, it does not just disappear from one spot. Roads and farm boundaries break the remaining forest into smaller and smaller patches – this is called **habitat fragmentation**. It makes it much harder for animals to find food, find mates or move safely through the landscape. Local and indigenous communities who depend on the forest for food, water and shelter are also affected when the land around them is cleared. Tropical countries lost 11.1 million hectares of tree cover in 2021, including 3.75 million hectares of **primary forest** – the oldest, most biodiverse forest, which has never been cleared before and cannot simply be replanted.

Forests play a critical role in regulating the Earth's climate by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. When trees are cut down, that stored carbon is released, contributing to climate change. This makes deforestation not just a local problem, it has consequences for the whole planet.

Producing meat and animal produce requires a large amount of land – both for grazing and for growing feed crops. Producing the same amount of nutrition directly from plants requires significantly less land. What food is produced and how (also known as a **food system**) has a direct impact on how much forest needs to be cleared. Research published in 2023 found that biodiversity loss linked to high-meat diets is nearly three times greater than that linked to plant-based diets.

Sources:

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