

The Brazilian Amazon Biome

Brazil: Home to vital ecological and agricultural regions

Brazil is home to some of the world's most vital ecological regions, including a majority of the Amazon rainforest.¹ The planet's largest and most species-rich tropical rainforest, the Amazon covers almost half of the country.² Brazil's role in helping to feed an expanding global population and supply the improving diets of people in developing nations is balanced with the need to protect and preserve the Amazon rainforest and its related ecosystems, which bring important benefits to the world.

The Amazon rainforest

The largest and most biologically diverse expanse of forest in the world, the Amazon rainforest represents approximately one-third of the planet's rainforest area and is home to as many as one-third of its species.³ The rainforest also absorbs carbon from the atmosphere and contributes to climate stabilization, and its plants are the source for one-fourth of the world's pharmaceutical products.⁴

The Brazilian Amazon biome vs. the Legal Amazon

The Brazilian biome is distinct from the Legal Amazon. The Brazilian Amazon biome delineates the Amazon rainforest and its related ecosystems in Brazil. (Figure 1) It encompasses approximately 4.2 million square kilometers and is home to 16 million people.⁵ The Legal Amazon, by contrast, is a politically defined area spanning nine Brazilian states – Acre, Amazonas, Roraima, Amapá, Pará, Rondônia, Mato Grosso, Tocantins and Maranhão – and eight different ecological regions. It covers 5.1 million square kilometers, or 61 percent of Brazil's territory. It is home to 23 million people.⁶



Figure 1. The Brazilian Amazon biome⁷

The Brazilian Amazon Biome



Figure 2. The Brazilian Amazon biome vs. The Legal Amazon⁸

The Legal Amazon was defined in 1953 and modified in 1977 as part of a development plan for northern Brazil that called for infrastructure and other investment. Maranhão, Tocantins and Mato Grosso lobbied to be included within its boundaries, even though significant portions of these states lie outside the Amazon biome. Mato Grosso, Brazil's primary soy-growing state, spans 906,000 square kilometers, roughly 8 percent of which is cropland. (Figure 2)

The role of soy in Amazon deforestation

The Brazilian Amazon biome is the most well preserved biome in Brazil, and perhaps the world, with about 83 percent still forested.⁹ Human settlement, industrial activities and agricultural expansion each have contributed to deforestation over time. Recently, soybean farming has gained public attention as a factor contributing to the cycle of deforestation. To date, less than 0.3 percent of the biome has been cultivated to grow soybeans.¹⁰

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Brazil's environmental laws allow for limited agricultural production in the Amazon biome. Farmers operating in the biome are legally allowed to plant on 20 percent of their land. The remaining 80 percent must be preserved.

Deforestation is a complex process that often begins with illegal logging. Cleared land then is sold cheaply for pasture or subsistence farming and ranching. Only after a period of time is deforested land generally used for soy farming.

Industry responsibility

Bunge recognizes that it has a responsibility to help curb deforestation associated with soy farming in the Amazon biome. ABIOVE and ANEC, trade associations representing Bunge and other companies in these respective industries, jointly announced on July 24, 2006, that their members will cease trading soy harvested from newly deforested areas in the Brazilian Amazon biome and will work in cooperation with government, farmers and other committed parties to promote responsible agriculture and develop sustainable land-use policies.

Bunge and other agribusiness companies have formed a dedicated soy working group with NGOs WWF, Greenpeace, Conservation International, The Nature Conservancy, Articulação Soja-Brasil and others. The purpose of this group is to work in partnership with government, civil society and other key stakeholders to implement the moratorium and to address various environmental, social and economic issues critical to the preservation of the Amazon biome.

Technical sub-groups are tackling challenges in the following areas.

- The *mapping and monitoring* sub-group is collaborating with Brazil's National Institute for Space Research to develop a reliable, internationally recognized monitoring system to track agricultural development in the region.
- The *education, information and forest code* sub-group is working to increase farmer education on environmental compliance and best practices through training, publications and outreach.
- The *institutional relations* sub-group is consulting with the Brazilian government at the federal and state level on the development of more effective land-use policies and enforcement strategies.

For updates on the progress of the soy working group, please visit ABIOVE's web site at http://www.abiove.com.br/english/menu_us.html.

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Bunge also participates in the global Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS). This multi-stakeholder group, comprised of industry, government and NGOs, is working to create global principles and practices for environmentally and socially responsible soy production, processing and trading. ABIOVE is a member of the RTRS's executive board. You can learn more by visiting www.responsiblesoy.org.

End Notes

- 1 Conservation International Web site, <http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/regions/neotropics/brazil.xml>
- 2 Conservation International *ibid.*
- 3 Conservation International *ibid.*
- 4 Conservation International Web site, <http://www.conservation.org/xp/CIWEB/regions/priorityareas/wilderness/amazonia.xml>
- 5 IBGE (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística) – www.ibge.gov.br
- 6 ADA (Agência de Desenvolvimento da Amazônia) – www.ada.gov.br, IBGE and INPE (Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais) – www.inpe.br
- 7 This map provides an approximate representation of the boundaries of the Brazilian Amazon Biome based on maps developed using the Global Forest Watch Interactive Map feature available at <http://www.globalforestwatch.org/english/interactive.maps/brazil.htm>. Global Forest Watch is an initiative of the World Resources Institute and is not affiliated with Bunge Limited. For official maps, please consult IBGE (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística) – www.ibge.gov.br.
- 8 *ibid.*
- 9 INPE (Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais) – www.inpe.br
- 10 IBGE