

12.4 What Rubber Tappers Want

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.

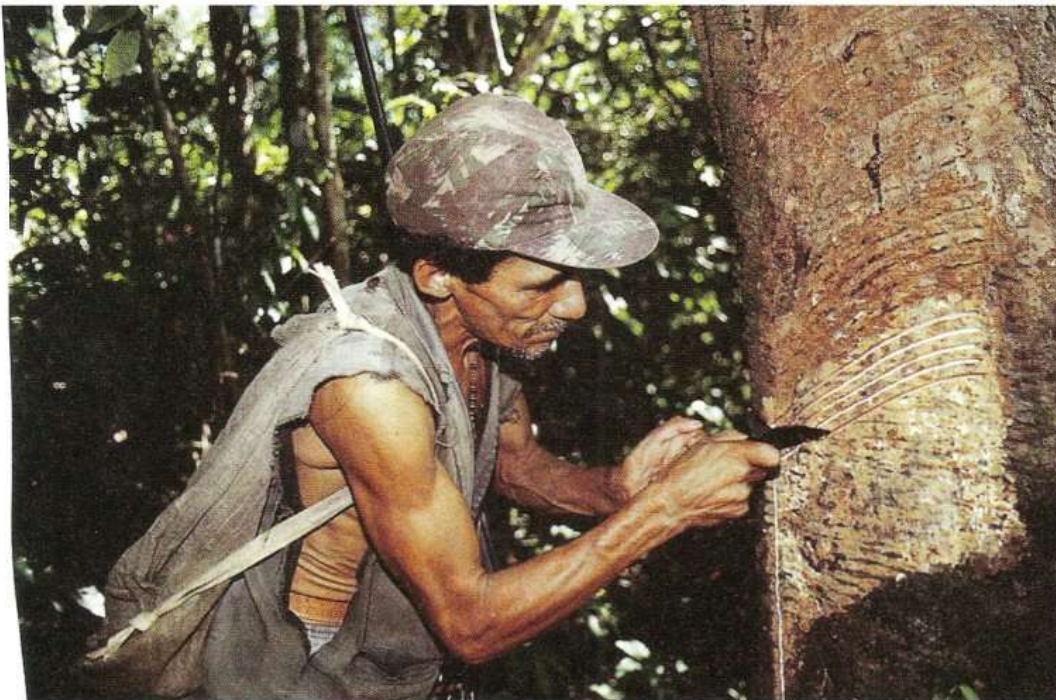
Rubber Tapping Does Not Hurt the Forest Rubber tappers first came to the Amazon region during the 1870s, when they were hired to work on rubber tree plantations in the rainforest. When the price of rubber dropped, most of the plantations were abandoned. However, some of the rubber tappers decided to 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.

In the 1960s, the government of Brazil decided that there were better ways to use the rainforest. It encouraged people to clear the forest for farms and ranches. In the deforestation that followed, many rubber trees disappeared, leading to land use conflict between the rubber tappers and the newcomers.

Let Us Continue Our Sustainable Way of Life Since rubber tappers want to continue making a living from the rainforest, they need to stop the widespread clearing of trees. Therefore they have asked the government of Brazil to create protected **reserves** within the rainforest. These areas would be set aside for sustainable activities such as rubber tapping.

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.



Scoring a Rubber Tree

Rubber tappers collect sap from rubber trees without hurting them. One tapper, Chico Mendes, became a leader in the fight to preserve the rainforest. Eventually, because of his activities, he was murdered. His death brought world attention to the rubber tappers' cause.