



Clearing Rainforest for Farming

Settlers who come to the rainforest clear the trees off their land to create farm fields. Farming in this environment is not easy. The constant rain washes away the soil's nutrients. Tropical insects also kill many crops.

12.6 What Settlers Want

Though Brazil has the eleventh largest economy in the world, almost one quarter of Brazilians are poor. In **rural** areas, an even greater proportion of the population is poor.

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.

A Lot of Land, but Not for the Poor 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.

The Brazilian government did what it could to try to make this dream a reality. The government brought poor families to the rainforest, supplying them with money and free land to enable them to plant their first crops.

We Need Land to Feed Our Families Over time, however, the settlers' dream has become a nightmare for many farm families. As native Amazonians had learned long ago, farming in a rainforest is extremely difficult. The thin soil is surprisingly poor in **nutrients**, which are the substances that make a field fertile. Constant rainfall soon washes away whatever nutrients the soil once contained. As the soil loses its fertility, the amount of food it can produce shrinks. The native Amazonians solved this problem by clearing new fields every few years. Over time, their abandoned fields regained some fertility.

However, Brazilian settlers cannot relocate as easily as the native Amazonians. As more settlers have cleared land for farming, opposition to settlers has grown. Native Amazonians, rubber tappers, and ranchers all want the settlers to leave the rainforest. In response, the settlers argue that there is no land for them in other parts of Brazil. They say they must look to the rainforest for land to feed their families.