



A Cattle Drive in the Rainforest

Cattle like these are a common sight in the Amazon basin. Cattle ranching is now one of the main causes of deforestation in the rainforest. Ranchers say they are raising food for the world. And many countries are happy to buy Brazilian beef.

12.7 What Cattle Ranchers Want

A rainforest may not seem like it could be cattle country, but since the 1960s parts of the Amazon basin have become just that. Although the Amazon cattle ranchers are a small group, they own large areas of rainforest land.

Cattle Need Grasslands to Graze Rainforest cattle graze primarily on grass. They consume the grass in an area all the way down to the dirt, and then they are moved to a new area with fresh grass to eat. Moving cattle from place to place gives grazed areas an opportunity to grow new grass, but this practice also uses up a lot of land.

Today cattle can be found grazing on vast areas of grassland throughout the Amazon basin. Loggers cleared some of this land, and farmers and ranchers cleared the rest. After large tracts of rainforest are cleared, the trees seldom grow back. Instead, the cleared areas become grasslands. This permanent deforestation upsets many people, but it is of great benefit to ranchers.

We Need Land to Feed the World Many people argue that cattle don't belong in a rainforest. Cattle ranchers strongly disagree, arguing that they are making good use of rainforest land by raising food for the world and earning income for Brazil.

Many countries import beef from Brazil. In fact, the United States is one of the biggest buyers of Brazilian beef. Some environmental groups are dissatisfied with this trade. They estimate that 55 square feet of rainforest have to be cleared for every hamburger that is sold in the United States.

Like logging, cattle ranching has become an important economic activity in Brazil. In 2003, the value of beef exported to other countries was in excess of \$1.5 billion. The government of Brazil can use the money that is earned from beef sales to help pay its debts and to care for its citizens.