

Deforestation costing Brazilian farmers millions

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An article from The Economist analyzes the economic and environmental impacts of deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon, particularly in relation to the agricultural sector, which is a major driver of the country's economy. The article underscores a study from the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) and Rainforest Foundation Norway (RFN), which links deforestation to reduced crop yields, specifically for soybeans and maize. It reveals that from 2006 to 2019, deforestation contributed to approximately \$1 billion in economic losses, with soybean revenues decreasing by 10% and maize revenues falling by 20 per cent during that period.

Deforestation is not only an environmental concern but also a significant economic issue for Brazilian farmers. The study demonstrates how clear-cutting forests reduces crop yields by disrupting the region's natural water cycle, which affects rainfall patterns and temperatures crucial for crop growth.

The loss of rainfall, particularly in areas where over 80 per cent of the forest has been cleared, has been particularly damaging to crop yields. From 1999 to 2019, rainfall in key soybean-growing and maize-growing areas fell by 40 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively, while temperatures increased by 2.5°C. This has resulted in smaller harvests, contributing to the financial losses faced by farmers.

The article warns that if deforestation continues, farmers—across all sectors, including cattle ranchers—will face increasingly difficult conditions. One estimate suggests that by 2050, agricultural losses could reach \$1 billion per year due to the worsening climate

conditions and reduced crop yields.

Reforestation efforts in areas like the Brazilian state of Pará could help mitigate some of these negative effects by restoring the water cycle and improving rainfall patterns. The study suggests that reforesting 55,000 square kilometers of land in Pará could lead to earlier rainfall and more precipitation, potentially benefiting agricultural production. However, the challenge of implementing such a large-scale reforestation effort is considerable.

Despite the mounting evidence of deforestation's economic cost, Brazilian agricultural firms and farmers remain skeptical of the link between climate change, deforestation, and declining yields. The term "agri-phobia" is used to describe the suspicion some farmers have towards scientists who criticize farming practices that contribute to environmental degradation. Farmers continue to dispute claims that their lower yields are due to deforestation and climate change, and they view these findings with a certain level of denial or hostility.

The article highlights the tension between environmental and agricultural interests, with some farmers arguing that the focus on environmental issues like deforestation detracts from their economic success and needs.

The report's lead author, Britaldo Soares-Filho, emphasizes the need to reframe the issue in economic terms, rather than just focusing on environmental concerns. By highlighting the direct financial impact of deforestation on crop yields, he hopes to convince the agricultural industry that sustainable farming practices are in their long-term economic interest. Soares-Filho argues that farmers may be engaging in "agri-suicide" by rejecting sustainability and continuing destructive farming practices.

The article suggests that the intersection of environmental sustainability and economic pragmatism is key to addressing the deforestation crisis in Brazil. While the immediate financial losses are already being felt by farmers, the long-term impacts of deforestation on agricultural productivity could lead to even greater economic hardships.

Reforestation and sustainable farming practices are presented as potential solutions, but achieving these will require overcoming entrenched skepticism in the agricultural sector. The article ultimately argues that making the financial case for sustainable farming may be the best path forward to changing the minds of those who continue to deny the connection between deforestation and economic harm.

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