



MINISTERIO DE AGRICULTURA,  
ALIMENTACIÓN Y MEDIO AMBIENTE

TRIBUNAL CALIFICADOR  
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## THE DISAPPEARING RAINFORESTS

- We are losing Earth's greatest biological treasures just as we are beginning to appreciate their true value. Rainforests once covered 14% of the earth's land surface; now they cover a mere 6% and experts estimate that the last remaining rainforests could be consumed in less than 40 years.
- One and one-half acres of rainforest are lost every second with tragic consequences for both developing and industrial countries.
- Rainforests are being destroyed because the value of rainforest land is perceived as only the value of its timber by short-sighted governments, multi-national logging companies, and land owners.
- Nearly half of the world's species of plants, animals and microorganisms will be destroyed or severely threatened over the next quarter century due to rainforest deforestation.
- Experts estimates that we are losing 137 plant, animal and insect species every single day due to rainforest deforestation. That equates to 50,000 species a year. As the rainforest species disappear, so do many possible cures for life-threatening diseases. Currently, 121 prescription drugs sold worldwide come from plant-derived sources. While 25% of Western pharmaceuticals are derived from rainforest ingredients, less than 1% of these tropical trees and plants have been tested by scientists.
- Most rainforests are cleared by chainsaws, bulldozers and fires for its timber value and then are followed by farming and ranching operations, even by world giants like Mitsubishi Corporation, Georgia Pacific, Texaco and Unocal.
- There were an estimated ten million Indians living in the Amazonian Rainforest five centuries ago. Today there are less than 200,000.
- In Brazil alone, European colonists have destroyed more than 90 indigenous tribes since the 1900's. With them have gone centuries of accumulated knowledge of the medicinal value of rainforest species. As their homelands continue to be destroyed by deforestation, rainforest peoples are also disappearing.
- Most medicine men and shamans remaining in the Rainforests today are 70 years old or more. Each time a rainforest medicine man dies, it is as if a library has burned down.
- When a medicine man dies without passing his arts on to the next generation, the tribe and the world loses thousands of years of irreplaceable knowledge about medicinal plants.

### The Wealth of the Rainforests

- The Amazon Rainforest covers over a billion acres, encompassing areas in Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia and the Eastern Andean region of Ecuador and Peru. If Amazonia were a country, it would be the ninth largest in the world.



- The Amazon Rainforest has been described as the "Lungs of our Planet" because it provides the essential environmental world service of continuously recycling carbon dioxide into oxygen. More than 20 percent of the world oxygen is produced in the Amazon Rainforest.
- More than half of the world's estimated 10 million species of plants, animals and insects live in the tropical rainforests. One-fifth of the world's fresh water is in the Amazon Basin.
- One hectare (2.47 acres) may contain over 750 types of trees and 1500 species of higher plants.
- At least 80% of the developed world's diet originated in the tropical rainforest. Its bountiful gifts to the world include fruits like avocados, coconuts, figs, oranges, lemons, grapefruit, bananas, guavas, pineapples, mangos and tomatoes; vegetables including corn, potatoes, rice, winter squash and yams; spices like black pepper, cayenne, chocolate, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, sugar cane, tumeric, coffee and vanilla and nuts including Brazil nuts and cashews.
- At least 3000 fruits are found in the rainforests; of these only 200 are now in use in the Western World. The Indians of the rainforest use over 2,000.
- Rainforest plants are rich in secondary metabolites, particularly alkaloids. Biochemists believe alkaloids protect plants from disease and insect attacks. Many alkaloids from higher plants have proven to be of medicinal value and benefit.
- Currently, 121 prescription drugs currently sold worldwide come from plant-derived sources. And while 25% of Western pharmaceuticals are derived from rainforest ingredients, less than 1% of these tropical trees and plants have been tested by scientists.
- The U.S. National Cancer Institute has identified 3000 plants that are active against cancer cells. 70% of these plants are found in the rainforest. Twenty-five percent of the active ingredients in today's cancer-fighting drugs come from organisms found only in the rainforest.
- Vincristine, extracted from the rainforest plant, periwinkle, is one of the world's most powerful anticancer drugs. It has dramatically increased the survival rate for acute childhood leukemia since its discovery.
- In 1983, there were no U.S. pharmaceutical manufacturers involved in research programs to discover new drugs or cures from plants. Today, over 100 pharmaceutical companies and several branches of the US government, including giants like Merck and The National Cancer Institute, are engaged in plant research projects for possible drugs and cures for viruses, infections, cancer, and even AIDS.

#### Rainforest Action

- Experts agree that by leaving the rainforests intact and harvesting its many nuts, fruits, oil-producing plants, and medicinal plants, the rainforest has more economic value than if they were cut down to make grazing land for cattle or for timber.



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- The latest statistics show that rainforest land converted to cattle operations yields the land owner \$60 per acre and if timber is harvested, the land is worth \$400 per acre. However, if these renewable and sustainable resources are harvested, the land will yield the land owner \$2,400 per acre.
- If managed properly, the rainforest can provide the world's need for these natural resources on a perpetual basis.
- Promoting the use of these sustainable and renewable sources could stop the destruction of the rainforests. By creating a new source of income harvesting the medicinal plants, fruits nuts, oil and other sustainable resources, the rainforests is be more valuable alive than cut and burned.
- Sufficient demand of sustainable and ecologically harvested rainforest products is necessary for preservation efforts to succeed. Purchasing sustainable rainforest products can effect positive change by creating a market for these products while supporting the native people's economy and provides the economic solution and alternative to cutting the forest just for the value of its timber.

