

Brazil: Deforestation sees biggest drop in 20 yrs

November 12 2009, By MARCO SIBAJA , Associated Press Writer



Back dropped by a map depicting the Amazon rainforest, Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, right, gestures as Chief of Staff Dilma Rousseff, center, and the Environment Minister Carlos Minc talk during a ceremony in Brasilia, Thursday, Nov. 12, 2009. The government announced a sharp drop in the rate of deforestation in the Amazon in September. (AP Photo/Eraldo Peres)

(AP) -- Deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon dropped nearly 46 percent from August 2008 to July 2009 - the biggest annual decline in two decades, the government said Thursday.

Analysis of [satellite imagery](#) by the National Institute for Space Research shows an estimated 7,008 square kilometers (2,705 square

miles) of forest were cleared during the 12-month period, the lowest rate since the government started monitoring deforestation in 1988.

"The new deforestation data represents an extraordinary and significant reduction for [Brazil](#)," President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said in a statement.

The numbers have been falling since 2004, when they reached a peak of 27,000 square kilometers (10,425 square miles) cleared in one year, according to the space research institute.

The government credited its aggressive monitoring and enforcement measures for the drop, as well as its promotion of sustainable activities in the [Amazon](#) region, an area in northern Brazil the size of the U.S. west of the Mississippi River.

But Paulo Gustavo, environmental policy director of Conservation International, said a major factor is the drop in world prices for beef, soy and other products that drive people to clear land for agriculture in the rainforest.

"The police control has improved a little, there has been success in controlling deforestation," Gustavo said. "But the main factor is the drop in commodity prices, which are the main factor in speeding up or slowing deforestation."

Satellite images from the space research institute have allowed government inspectors to increase enforcement, the government said.

The Brazilian Environment Institute reported confiscating about 230,000 cubic meters (8.1 million cubic feet) of wood, 414 trucks and tractors and 502,000 hectares (1.2 million acres) of land linked to illegal deforestation activities from August 2008 to July 2009. The government

has also issued \$1.6 billion in fines, the statement said.

Amazon [deforestation](#) causes 75 percent of Brazil's greenhouse gas emissions, according to the National Inventory of Greenhouse Gases.

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