

# Brazil farmers deforesting Amazon 'to survive'

August 27 2019, by Carlos Fabal

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Thousands of troops and firefighters have been deployed to combat the fires devouring chunks of the Amazon

On his block of land deep in the Amazon rainforest, Aurelio Andrade says deforestation is the only way he and other farmers can survive in the

remote region where fires are raging.

"Here we have no support from the [federal government](#) or anyone else, only from God," Andrade tells AFP, wearing an army camouflage T-shirt and matching hat, on his property 120 kilometers (75 miles) from Porto Velho in the northwestern state of Rondonia.

"We cut trees to plant grass to survive, so that the cattle eat," says the portly Andrade, apparently oblivious to the growing global outcry over the worst fires in years.

Seen from above, the devastation around Andrade's land caused by fires and deforestation is dramatic.

Swaths of territory stripped of trees, some of it blackened and smouldering, in a scene that is repeated across the world's largest rainforest.

Andrade and his wife have lived on their small block for 19 years, eking out a living by raising cattle, horses, pigs, hens and ducks.

It was "no-man's land" when the couple moved there and Andrade hopes authorities will eventually recognize him as the legal landowner.

Land-grabbing by farmers, ranchers or loggers in the vast Amazon basin has long been a problem and a source of conflict with indigenous tribes.

On the other side of the boundary fence, fire advances across his neighbor's property.





View of fire in the Amazon rainforest, near Abuna, Rondonia state, Brazil, on August 24, 2019

While thousands of troops and firefighters have been deployed to combat the fires devouring chunks of the Amazon, none appear to have made it as far as this area where communications are poor or non-existent.

Andrade is losing sleep worrying that his neighbor's fire will cross into his property and he monitors its progress closely.

"I'm scared. Any night you are sleeping that fire could cause a very serious problem," he says.

"During the day, I come to look from here, next to the fence, and see where the smoke is and where the [fire](#) is."

Experts say increased land clearing during the months-long dry season to make way for grazing or crops has aggravated this year's fires.

Even small landholders like Andrade have been blamed for fueling the destruction.

But Andrade says they have no choice.

"Even if you take a deserted area you have to clear, burn and make a house where you can live with your children," he says.

"You're not going to make a house in the hollow of a tree, as if you were a bird, right?"

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Citation: Brazil farmers deforesting Amazon 'to survive' (2019, August 27) retrieved 4 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-08-brazil-farmers-deforesting-amazon-survive.html>

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