



BRAZILIAN FOREST CODE

PRODUCTION AND PRESERVATION



CONFEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK OF BRAZIL (CNA)

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Enactment of Law N°. 12,651/2012, which established the Brazilian Forest Code, is the outcome of broad dialogue within Brazilian society, culminating in one of the most advanced legal frameworks in the world for reconciling agricultural production and environmental conservation. Brazil has pioneered the creation of legislation that harmonizes productive land use with the protection of native vegetation through the establishment of clear rules, modern monitoring instruments, and incentives for environmental compliance.

For the Brazilian Confederation of Agriculture and Livestock (CNA), which represents more than five million rural producers across the Country, the Forest Code symbolizes Brazilian farmers' commitment to sustainable development, demonstrating that it is possible to produce food and renewable, clean energy without compromising the environment. This law enhances Brazil's reputation as an agro-environmental power, capable of harnessing technology and efficiency to ensure responsible land management.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Implementation of the Brazilian Forest Code entails coordination among key legal, technical, economic, and institutional aspects to ensure a balance between environmental protection and economic development. Rural producers play a key role in this process, both as on-site managers of natural resources and as providers of environmental services, serving as custodians of roughly one-third of the Country's conserved areas.

Endowed with immense botanical and wildlife diversity, Brazil has approximately 500 million hectares of forests, 97% of which retain native vegetation cover, with sustainable production in a significant portion under managed forestry concessions. Planted forests, primarily of eucalyptus and pine, account for 1.3% of Brazil's GDP - and nearly 7% of industrial GDP - generating millions of jobs and consolidating the Country's position as one of the world's leading pulp and paper producers.

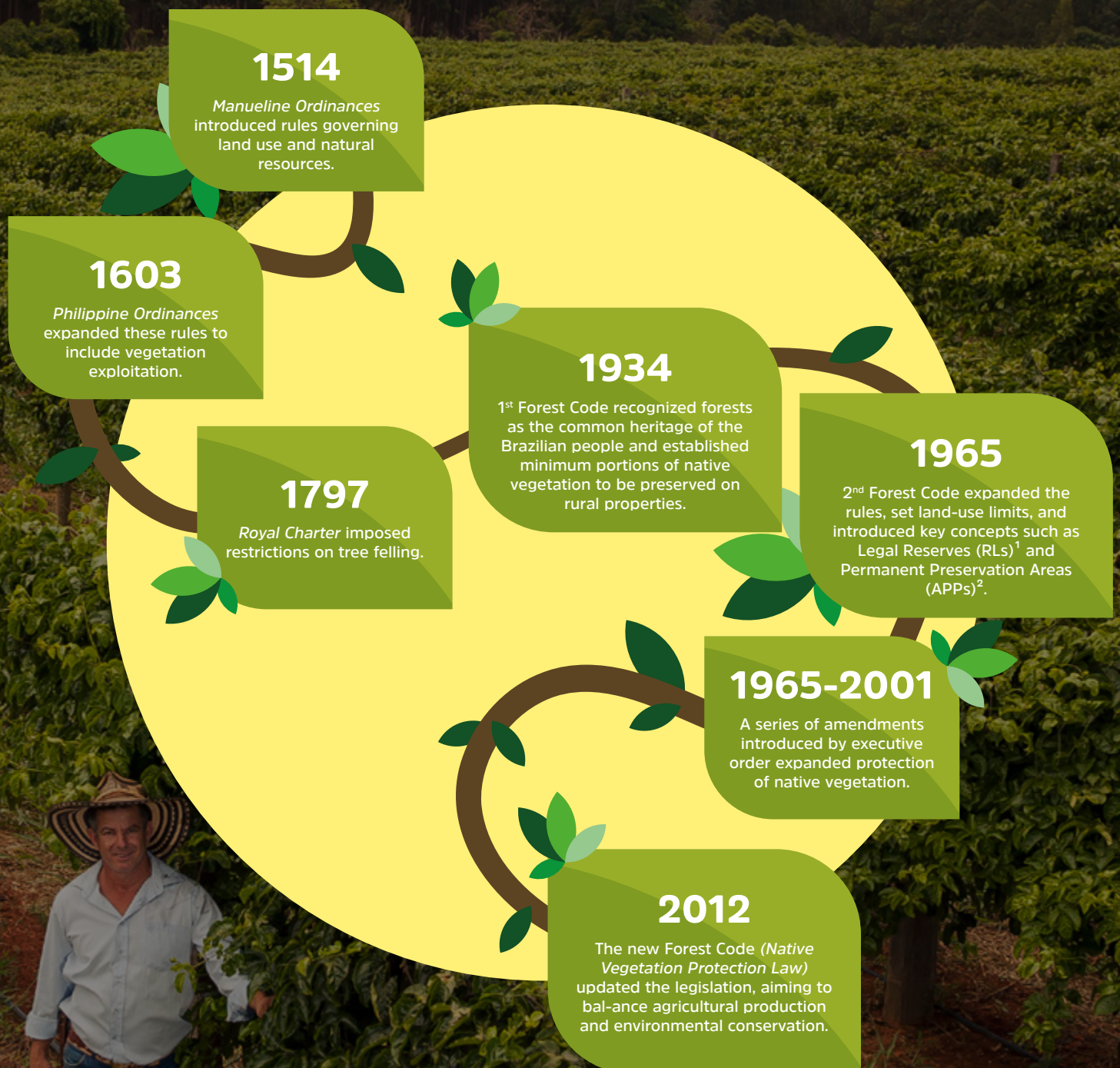
The protection of 282.8 million hectares of native vegetation within rural properties testifies to the engagement of Brazil's farmers in environmental conservation. Stewardship of this biodiversity – which accounts for more than 20% of the world's wildlife species – entails preserving vital ecosystems while simultaneously pursuing essential activities for the production of food, fiber, and energy.

Marking the 13th year since its enactment, the Forest Code reaffirms its importance as a strategic instrument for reconciling conservation and production, promoting environmental regularization, and acknowledging the role of rural producers in building a sustainable, low-impact economy.



2. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE BRAZILIAN FOREST CODE

The antecedents of the Brazilian Forest Code long predate its official enactment.



In force for 13 years, the Brazilian Forest Code embodies more than a decade of debate, nearly 200 public hearings, and near-unanimous approval in Congress. Its history, however, is rooted in centuries of legislation that have molded the Country's relationship with nature.

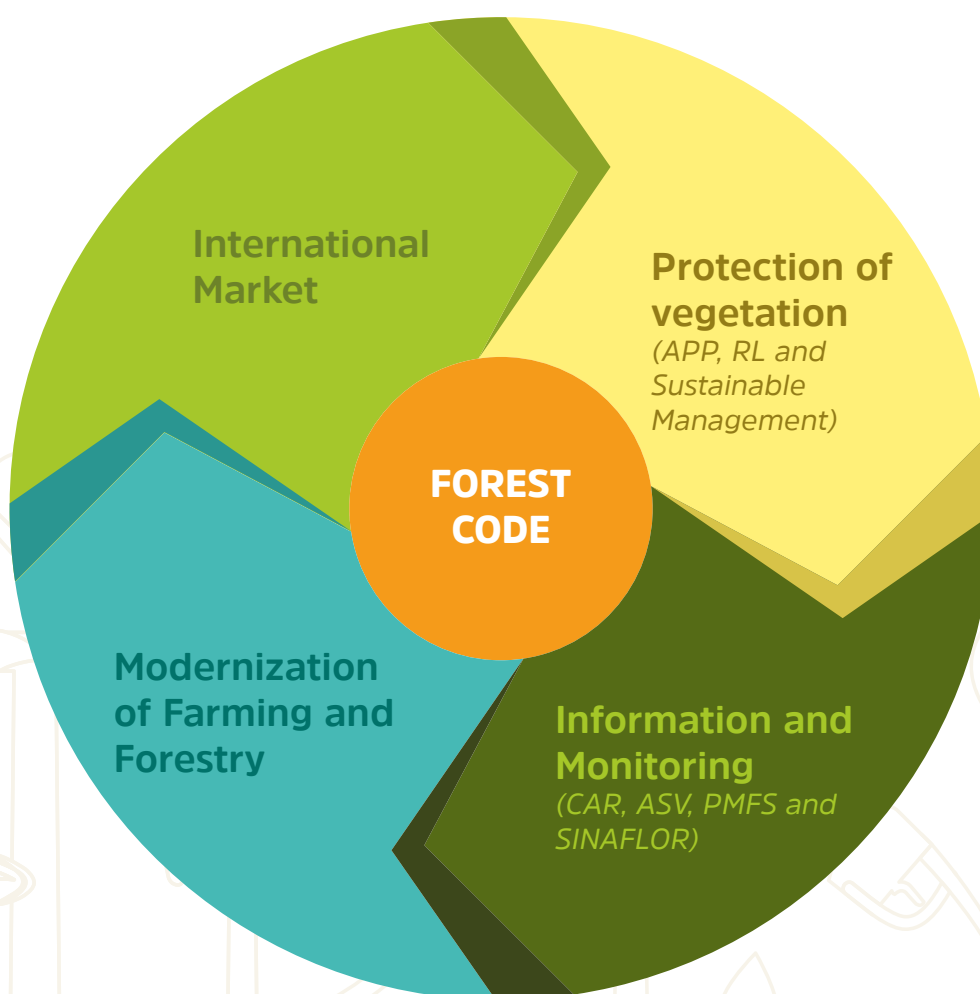
¹ Legal Reserves (pg. 8)

² Permanent Preservation Areas (pg. 10)

3. PRESENTING THE BRAZILIAN FOREST CODE

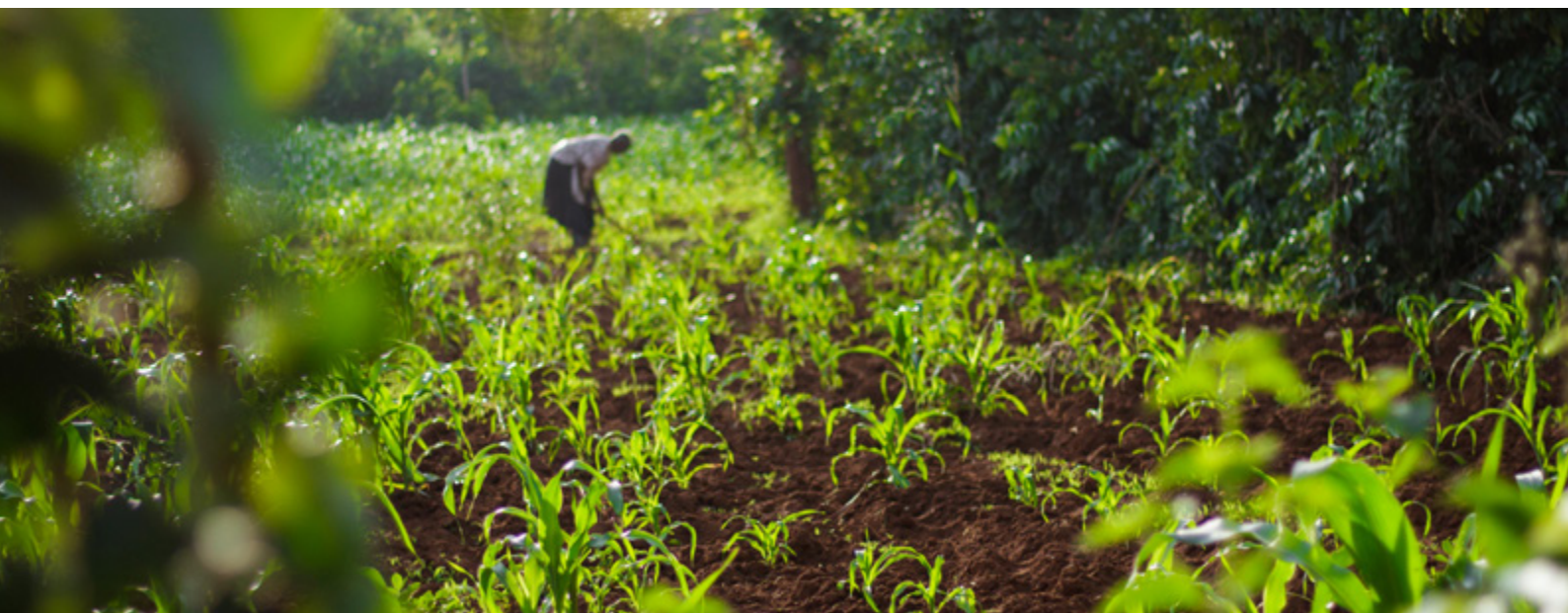
The Brazilian Forest Code encompasses instruments that strengthen environmental management and foster sustainable rural development. It establishes rules for the protection of native vegetation through mechanisms such as Permanent Preservation Areas (APPs), Legal Reserves (RLs), and sustainable forest management. It also provides for an efficient environmental information and monitoring system, featuring tools such as the Rural Environmental Registry (CAR), the Environmental Regularization Program (PRA), the Sustainable Forest Management Plan (PMFS), and the National System for Control of the Origin of Forest Products (SINAFLOR).

These instruments contribute to the modernization of agricultural and livestock production by ensuring greater efficiency, transparency, and environmental compliance. As a result, the Forest Code strengthens Brazil's credibility in international markets by aligning agricultural production with environmental conservation and sustainability.



Rural Environmental Registry (CAR)

The Rural Environmental Registry (CAR) is a mandatory public electronic database on which all Brazil's rural properties must be registered. It compiles information on Permanent Preservation Areas (APPs), Legal Reserves (RLs), remaining native vegetation, restricted-use areas, and consolidated production areas. The first step toward achieving environmental compliance for a property involves providing this information to the Rural Environmental Registry System (SICAR), which is managed by the federal government and subsequently reviewed by the competent authorities in each Brazilian state.



Consolidated rural area

The concept of a consolidated rural area marks a legal milestone within the Forest Code, as it enables the reconciliation of environmental preservation with the continuity of production on rural properties. By recognizing as consolidated those areas where agricultural and livestock activities had been undertaken prior to July 22, 2008, the law provides legal certainty for producers while established rules for the maintenance and recovery of areas under APP and LR.

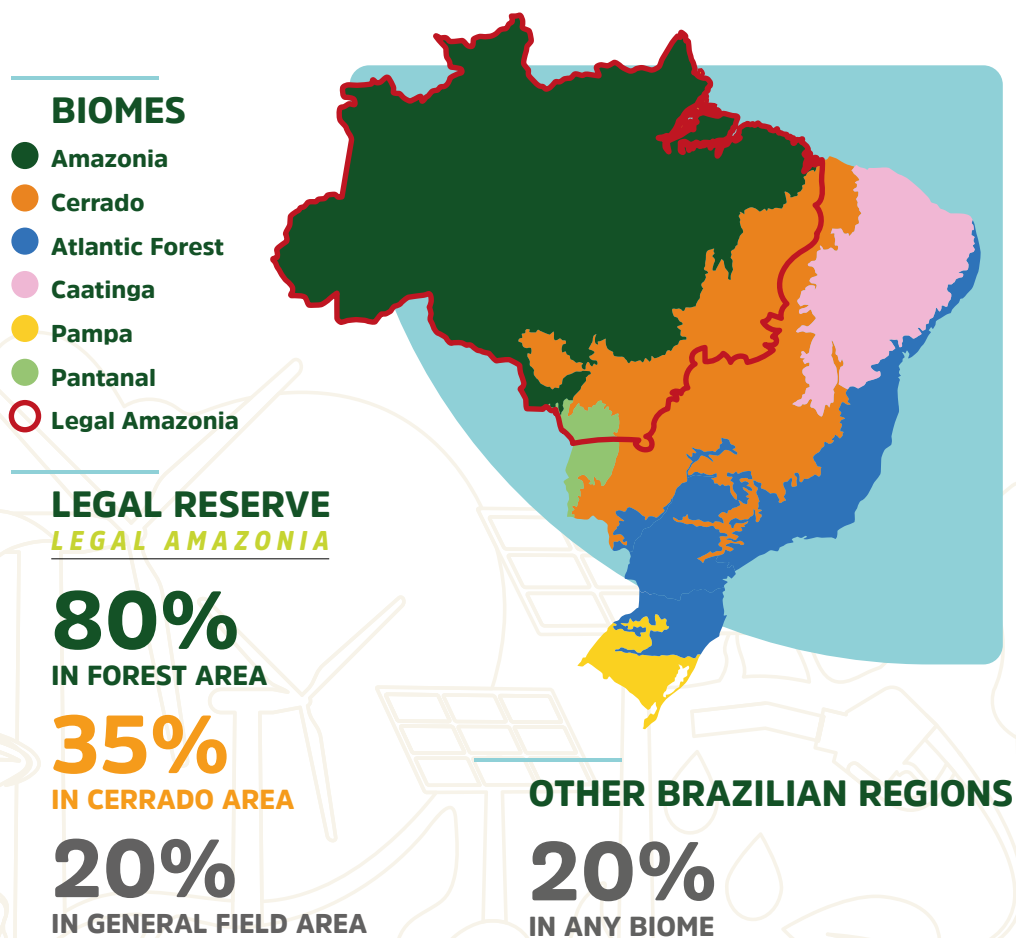
Legal Reserve (RL)

A Legal Reserve (RL) is the portion of a rural property where native vegetation must be preserved, though production may be allowed under sustainable forest management practices. The purpose of the RL is to ensure the rational use of natural resources while conserving ecological processes, protecting biodiversity, and providing shelter for flora and fauna.

The required proportion of Legal Reserve within each property varies by region: in the Legal Amazon, native vegetation must be preserved on 80% of the property; in cerrado areas, on 35%; and in plains (campos gerais) and all other regions of the Country, the minimum RL requirement is 20%

Unlike APPs, which are defined by natural features, the RL must be designated by the landowner, taking into account factors such as environmental vulnerability, importance for biodiversity, connection with APPs or other protected areas, as well as the local river basin plan and Ecological-Economic Zoning (ZEE).

When a property contains a consolidated area within its RL – that is, land already under human use prior to July 22, 2008 – the Forest Code allows for regularization through Legal Reserve compensation. This may be achieved by restoring native vegetation on the property itself, through natural regeneration, or by compensating in another equivalent area within the same biome. Compensation may take the form of Environmental Reserve Quotas (CRAs), leasing of areas with surplus Legal Reserves, or donation of land located within conservation units pending land-tenure regularization. Through such measures, the Forest Code seeks to reconcile rural production with environmental conservation, promoting ecosystem restoration while ensuring legal certainty for producers.



Permanent Preservation Areas (APP)

A Permanent Preservation Area (APP) is a protected area, whether or not covered by native vegetation, the environmental function of which is to preserve water resources, the landscape, geological stability, and biodiversity; to facilitate the genetic flow of fauna and flora; to protect the soil; and to ensure the well-being of human populations.

Among the types of Permanent Preservation Areas (APPs) are: areas surrounding rivers, lakes, ponds, and springs; palm swamps (veredas); dammed water reservoirs; coastal sandbanks (restingas); mangroves; slopes or portions thereof with an incline greater than 45°; hilltops; areas at altitudes above 1,800 meters; and the edges of plateaus or mesas. All APPs are defined by **law***; however, some are presented below in light of their specific characteristics and particular conditions related to the size of rural properties.

Buffer zones to be protected along riverbanks, streams and the areas surrounding springs, lakes, and ponds are defined from the edge of the regular riverbed and around natural bodies of water. In rural areas, the larger the lake or pond, the greater the required APP width. Springs, however – regardless of their topographic position – must have a minimum protection radius of 50 (fifty) meters. As a general rule, the width of APPs varies according to the width of the watercourse.



Restricted-Use Areas (AURs)

Restricted-Use Areas (AURs) include wetlands (pantanais), floodplains, and slopes between 25° and 45°. In such areas, sustainable use is permitted, provided that technical guidelines are observed and prior authorization has been granted by environmental authorities. On sloped terrain, forest management and agricultural activities may be carried out, but no new areas may be cleared unless expressly authorized under the Forest Code.



Data from the Rural Environmental Registry (CAR) show that nearly 100% of Brazil's rural properties are registered, and more than 58% have joined the Environmental Regularization Program (PRA). These figures demonstrate the strong commitment of Brazilian farmers to environmental compliance and adherence to requirements of the Forest Code.

The process begins with the registration and validation of the Rural Environmental Registry (CAR), with state governments responsible for implementing the guidelines of the Forest Code and issuing regulations for the Environmental Regularization Program (PRA). Once registration has been validated, the property may apply for participation in the program and begin restoring its environmental liabilities. The legislation brings several benefits for property regularization, with special conditions for properties up to four fiscal modules in size and for traditional peoples and communities, including:

- **Intervention in APP and RL:** authorization for occasional or low-impact activities upon a simple declaration to the competent authority
- **Support from public authorities:** technical and legal assistance from state governments for CAR registration and restoration of native vegetation.
- **Differentiated treatment under the PRA:**
 - » classification of native vegetation existing prior to July 22, 2008 as RL, without requiring new land conversions;
 - » reduction of the area to be restored in consolidated APPs; and
 - » restoration of APPs through intercropping of native and exotic species (up to 50% of the area).
- **Environmental Reserve Quota (CRA):** an innovative mechanism that allows Legal Reserve shortfalls to be offset with preserved or restored areas in other regions, thereby creating a market for environmental assets. This enables producers who have conserved more than the minimum required to be compensated, while those seeking compliance gain access to more feasible alternatives.



4. SUPPRESSION OF VEGETATION, USE OF FIRE AND WILDFIRE CONTROL

Authorization for Suppression of Vegetation (ASV) is the official permit required for legal removal of native vegetation in Brazil, in compliance with the protection requirements applicable to Permanent Preservation Areas (APPs), Legal Reserves (RLs) and Restricted-Use Areas (AURs). Required for projects of public, social or agricultural interest, the purpose of such authorizations is to regulate and monitor the exploitation and use of forest raw materials.

Issued by the competent federal, state, or municipal environmental authority, approval of the ASV is contingent upon technical studies that justify the suppression and provide for compensatory measures, such as planting of new trees. Without such authorization, vegetation removal is deemed illegal, and those responsible are subject to severe penalties, including embargo of the area, restrictions on rural credit, and difficulties in accessing both domestic and international markets.

Modern agriculture no longer relies on the use of fire, prioritizing more sustainable and efficient techniques. However, the Forest Code still allows, under exceptional circumstances, controlled burning on small properties or in regions where local conditions justify its use, provided prior authorization is obtained from the environmental authority. Such authorization requires the adoption of control measures – such as firebreaks, defined techniques, and notification of neighboring landowners – and compliance with the prohibition against using fire to clear native vegetation for alternative land use.

Fire control, for its part, involves the work of specialized firefighting units, the use of satellite monitoring, and coordination among environmental agencies to ensure preventive action and rapid response in combating wildfires.



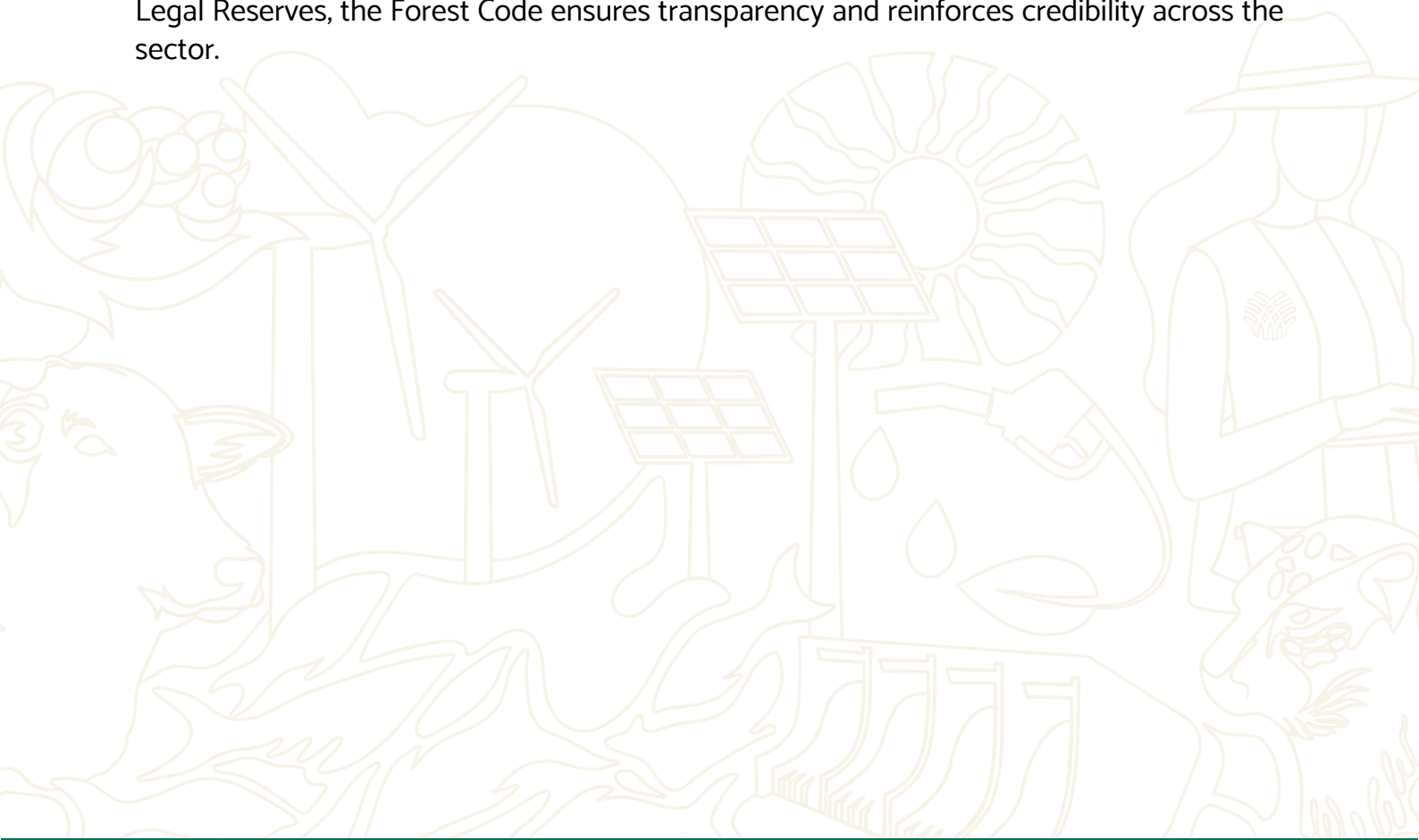
5. BENEFITS OF THE BRAZILIAN FOREST CODE FOR RURAL PRODUCERS

Notwithstanding the stringency of its regulations, the Brazilian Forest Code has brought greater clarity and legal certainty to rural producers, environmental agencies, and the broader economic sector. The culmination of more than a decade of debate, it stands as a global benchmark for sustainability policy, fostering responsible agricultural practices, sustainable forest management, and the restoration of degraded areas – all of which are pillars of a low-carbon economy.

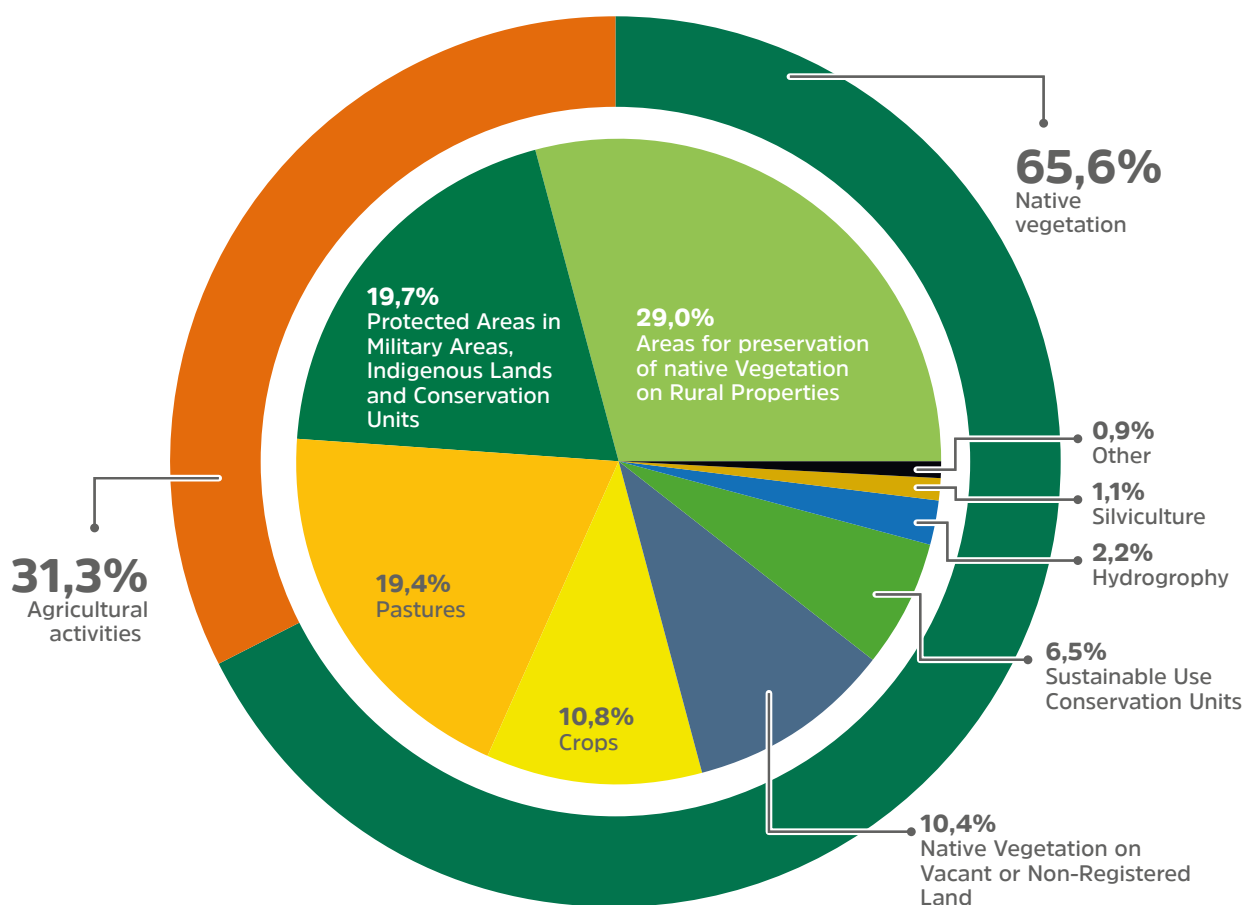
Compliance with the Forest Code also strengthens the reputation of Brazilian agribusiness abroad, given that international markets place increasing value on sustainable and traceable practices. The framework that the Forest Code provides serves to provide greater legal certainty – not only for the agricultural sector, but for all stakeholders subject to the law.

In recent years, Brazil has made progress in developing environmental economic instruments such as the Payment for Environmental Services (PES) program, which rewards those who conserve forests, protect springs, and preserve biodiversity. Credit and financing policies – such as Renovagro, part of the Plano Safra (Harvest Plan) – encourage rural producers to adopt sustainable practices more rapidly and efficiently. The ABC+ Program promotes actions aimed at reducing carbon emissions and ensuring the responsible use of natural resources, fostering a more productive and environmentally balanced agriculture.

Such initiatives demonstrate the feasibility of balancing production and preservation, while strengthening rural activity and ensuring Brazil's competitiveness in both domestic and international markets. In short, through implementation of the CAR and regularization of Legal Reserves, the Forest Code ensures transparency and reinforces credibility across the sector.



6. LAND USE AND OCCUPATION IN BRAZIL



Source: Embrapa Territorial, 2025.

In Brazil, rural producers play an essential role in environmental conservation. Currently, approximately 65.6% of national territory remains covered by preserved and protected native vegetation, and 29% of that area lies within rural properties.

Agricultural activities occupy approximately 31.3% of Brazil's territory, with 10% devoted to crops, 19% to livestock, and 1.1% to planted forests. In contrast, urban and infrastructure areas account for less than 1% of the national territory – a figure that underscores the leading role of farmers in conserving the Country's ecosystems.

7. THE BRAZILIAN FOREST CODE IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The Brazilian Forest Code ranks among the most comprehensive and advanced forest legislations in the world. It establishes clear rules for land use and the protection of native vegetation, seeking to reconcile agricultural production with environmental conservation – a commitment aligned with the goals of the Paris Agreement and other global initiatives to address climate change.

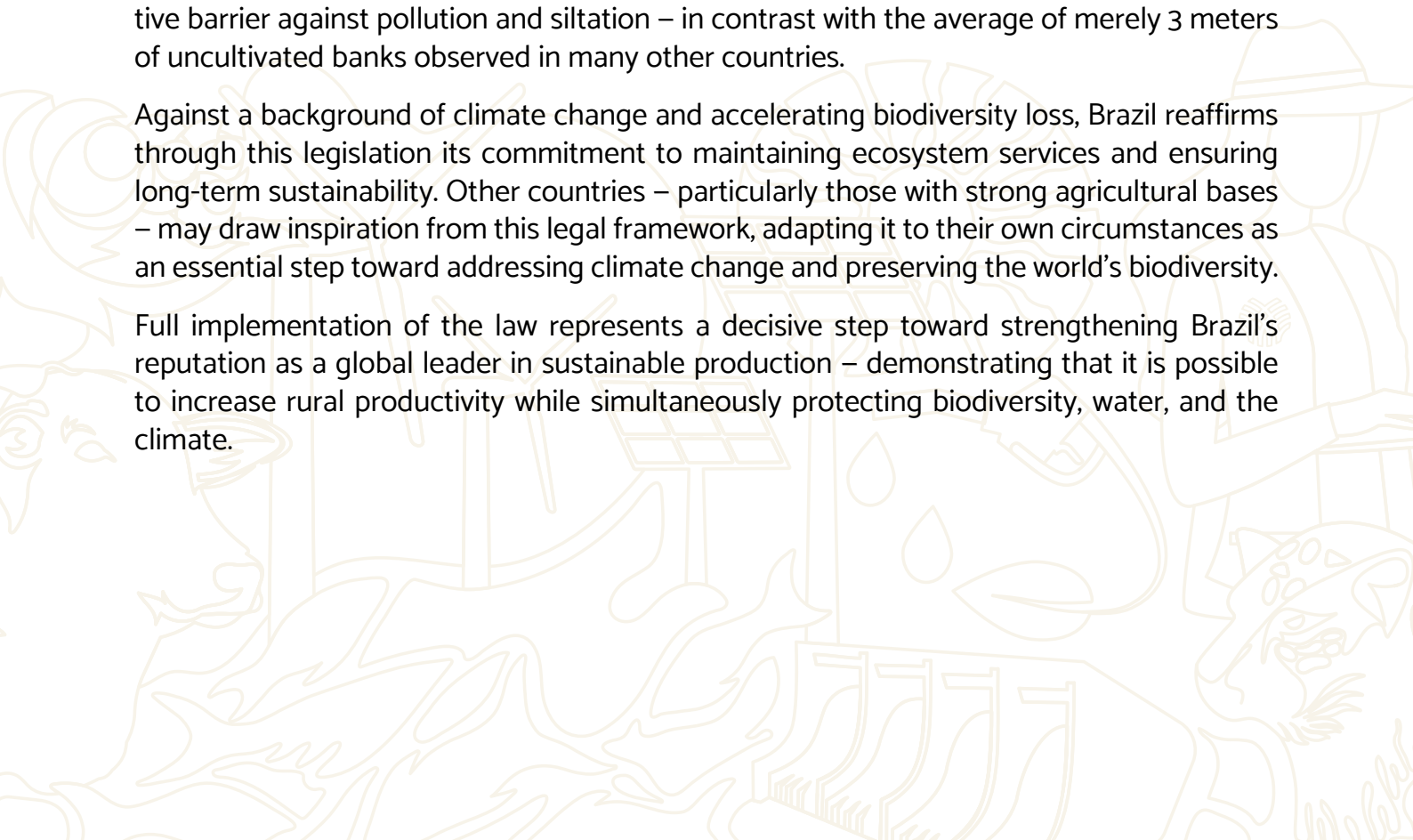
The evolution of this law reflects growing environmental awareness in Brazil. From the first Forest Code of 1934 – which focused primarily on forestry – to the 1965 version that expanded its scope to include the protection of forests and ecosystems, the legislation has continued to adapt to the Country's social, economic, and ecological transformations.

Brazil is the only country in the world that, by law, requires all private landholdings to maintain a portion of their area covered with native vegetation as a Legal Reserve dedicated to the protection of biodiversity – without offering any financial compensation to the landowner. Given the rigor and breadth of its environmental obligations – which encompass both Permanent Preservation Areas (APPs) and Legal Reserves (RLs) – the Forest Code stands as a global benchmark for conservation on private lands.

Remarkably, the Forest Code mandates the world's widest riparian buffer zones. While in many nations such protected strips range from 2 to 10 meters in width, Brazilian law requires preservation zones ranging from 30 to 500 meters, depending on the size of the watercourse. This provision compels Brazilian farmers to conserve significantly larger areas of native vegetation, thereby ensuring superior protection of water resources and an effective barrier against pollution and siltation – in contrast with the average of merely 3 meters of uncultivated banks observed in many other countries.

Against a background of climate change and accelerating biodiversity loss, Brazil reaffirms through this legislation its commitment to maintaining ecosystem services and ensuring long-term sustainability. Other countries – particularly those with strong agricultural bases – may draw inspiration from this legal framework, adapting it to their own circumstances as an essential step toward addressing climate change and preserving the world's biodiversity.

Full implementation of the law represents a decisive step toward strengthening Brazil's reputation as a global leader in sustainable production – demonstrating that it is possible to increase rural productivity while simultaneously protecting biodiversity, water, and the climate.



8. CONCLUSION

More than an environmental law, the Brazilian Forest Code is a strategic national asset. It translates Brazil's commitment to sustainability, food security, and the balance between production and conservation into concrete rules. Within this context, the Nation's rural producers stand as key agents of sustainability: they are the ones who, in their daily work, bring the law's principles to life through conservation, responsible management, and innovation across the countryside. By complying with the Forest Code, the agricultural sector not only secures its productivity but also contributes to biodiversity protection, climate change mitigation, and the strengthening of Brazil's global reputation.

Brazil continues to stand as a symbol of balance and a global benchmark. The Forest Code represents an essential commitment among society, the environment, and responsible productive activity. This legal instrument serves as a paradigm within the framework of Brazilian compliance, demonstrating the feasibility of harmonizing competitive and sustainable agriculture with the preservation of native vegetation, biological diversity, and water resources.

Maintaining a harmonious balance between these elements is the key to the broader project of global sustainable economic development, for which the Forest Code provides an exemplary model of environmental responsibility – not only for Brazil's agricultural sector, but also for those of other nations that still need to modernize and advance their environmental legislation.

“To produce, to preserve, and to feed the world – this is Brazil's commitment.”



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