Cattle Deforestation Risk Assessment

EUDR Context

Field	Value
eudr_commodity	cattle
country_focus	Colombia
eudr_article9_field	deforestation_risk_assessment
eudr_evidence_type	satellite_verification, risk_classification
deforestation_risk	HIGH
last_updated	2026-05-26

Overview

The cattle sector is the single largest driver of tropical deforestation globally, and Colombia is no exception. The EUDR requires operators to conduct risk assessments demonstrating that cattle products were not linked to post-2020 deforestation. For cattle, this assessment must cover every establishment in the animal's lifetime — a far more complex requirement than for stationary crops. The risk assessment must evaluate both direct deforestation (clearing forest for new pasture) and indirect deforestation (displacement effects where cattle ranching pushes into forest frontiers).

Colombia's cattle sector is estimated to be responsible for 60-80% of national deforestation. The country lost approximately 113,000 hectares of forest in 2024, with armed groups and cattle ranchers identified as the primary drivers of a 35% year-on-year increase. The three major deforestation fronts are the Amazonian arc (Caqueta, Guaviare, Putumayo), the Orinoquia transition zone (Meta, Vichada), and the Pacific lowlands (Choco, Narino). Each front has distinct deforestation dynamics, but praderizacion for cattle is the common driver.

The EUDR country benchmarking system will classify countries as low, standard, or high risk. Given Colombia's deforestation trajectory and the documented cattle-deforestation nexus, a high-risk classification for cattle is highly probable, triggering enhanced due diligence requirements including more detailed geolocation data, larger sample sizes for verification, and more frequent compliance checks.

Colombian Context

Praderizacion — the systematic conversion of forest to cattle pasture — is deeply embedded in Colombia's land colonization patterns. In many frontier regions, clearing forest and introducing cattle is used as a mechanism to establish de facto land ownership, particularly on public lands (baldios) and in areas affected by armed conflict. National parks including Sierra de la Macarena, Tinigua, and Cordillera de los Picachos have documented thousands of head of cattle grazing illegally, with over 24,000 cattle reported in protected areas in 2023.

Land titling challenges compound the problem: much of Colombia's cattle frontier operates without formal land titles, making it difficult to assign responsibility for deforestation to specific operators. The intersection of armed conflict, coca cultivation, and cattle ranching in departments like Caqueta and Guaviare creates a complex risk landscape where deforestation drivers are interlinked. EUDR compliance for Colombian cattle will require untangling these dynamics at the individual establishment level.

Cleantech Taxonomy Nodes

Directly relevant: CT-AF-002 (Forests and Woodlands — deforestation risk monitoring, needs eudr_cattle=Y), CT-EX-014 (Remote sensing — satellite deforestation detection, needs eudr_cattle=Y), CT-EX-019 (Due diligence platforms — risk assessment tools, needs eudr_cattle=Y). New extension needed: CT-EX-029 (Pasture-driven deforestation monitoring and risk classification) covering the specific dynamics of cattle-linked deforestation including praderizacion detection, illegal pasture encroachment into protected areas, and landscape-level risk scoring for cattle supply chains.

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