

SECTORAL OVERVIEW

Colombia is approximately one-tenth the size of Canada and offers sharp contrasts in climate and soil conditions. Almost half of the country is still covered by natural forests in the Amazon region and pasture lands make up another third. Overall, only five percent of the land is cultivated with seasonal and perennial crops, concentrated mainly in three types of regions:

- Tropical Flatlands (sea level to 1,000 meters above sea level), with the richest land located in the Upper Cauca River Valley, Sinu River Valley, Cesar River Valley and the foothills of the Eastern Plains. This is where most mechanized agriculture takes place, aided by modern irrigation and drainage. Typical crops are sugar cane, bananas, cacao, cassava, rice, corn, sorghum and soyabeans.
- Temperate Highlands (1,000 to 2,000 meters above sea level) located on the slopes of the three main (Eastern, Central and Western) mountain ranges of the Andean Cordillera. Coffee, sugar cane, fruit and poultry are the main products of this region.
- High Plateaus (2,000 to 3,000 meters above sea level) of Cundinamarca, Boyaca and Nariño, noted for dairy cattle and intensive cultivation of potatoes, wheat, barley, oats, flowers, vegetables and pulses.

The northern coastal plains and the vast eastern plains, the latter known as the "Llanos", comprise about half of Colombian territory and are characterized by cattle ranching. With proper irrigation and drainage, significant portions of this land could be made suitable for cultivation of specialty crops.

Planting seasons run from February through April and August through October and the corresponding harvesting periods four to six months later.

Colombian agriculture is substantially self-sufficient and exports are significant. It is competitive in several crops in addition to coffee, which continues to be the main crop and primary national export. In addition, Colombia is the world's second most important exporter of fresh flowers, the third largest banana exporter and the third largest producer of rice in the Western hemisphere. Overall the agriculture sector accounts for 22 percent of the country's GDP and approximately 40 percent of export earnings. One-third of the economically active population is engaged in agriculture.