

DEFORESTATION

Silvopastures and Conservation in La Esparza

from a informal conversation with Nelson Chavez, a livestock farmer in Costa Rica

Nelson Chavez from Costa Rica is one of the participants of the GEF-LEAD development project "Integrated Silvopastoral Approaches to Ecosystem Management", which is being implemented in Colombia, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. One of the objectives of this project is to test how farmers will respond to payments for environmental services of carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation. The basic conceptual element of the GEF-LEAD project is that payment for environmental services provided by silvopastoral systems would "tip the balance" towards greater profitability, and lead to increased adoption of more environmentally friendly technologies among farmers.

Mr. Chavez has a medium size farm in the Esparza region in Costa Rica, owns 10 dual purpose cattle and he has devoted a large part of his farm for conservation of the natural habitat. Deer, small mammals and a diversity of birds are common on his farm. He recognises the importance of conservation and the role of silvopastoral systems for biodiversity conservation. Mr Chavez gave us his impressions about the situation of livestock and environment in La Esparza.



"In the seventies there was a subsidy for farmers to increase the pastures in their land, this resulted in an increased number of animals per farm and the deforestation of riparian vegetation and hill sides. Once destroyed the vegetation, the natural springs started to dry out and the community realised the need for conservation. However it is very difficult to recover the watershed to its first condition. More than 30 years later it has not yet recovered completely. I think that the incentives for growing trees is a good thing but it will take time before we get water back into the watering holes."

"Milk is the best alternative in this region because it provides money faster than other activities. People

want to change their animals for a better breed but it is necessary to change pastures for the more productive silvopastures. There is credit but the interest is high (25%) and farmers end up giving the farm to the bank. We have to fight to maintain cattle because I like the farm life and I don't want to go to the city. The government should compensate people to stay and maintain their farms. In this region milk is the only way out for poor farmers, but the prices of the medicines, vaccines, concentrates and supplements are so high that only the big farmers can afford them. Small producers cannot survive from their farms and they end up selling the land to foreigners."

"Extension agents from Ministry of Agriculture are now promoting this project in the region. In the workshops I see the community motivated and eager to adopt the silvopastoral technologies to improve the pastures and to set aside land for conservation. For the project I am going to leave 10 acres for reforestation."

"Nature is the most beautiful thing that God gave us, but we have not taken care of it. My father worked most of his life with an axe, when he discovered the chain saw, he made very big mistakes. Any tree was a good excuse to use it. The chain saw and the legislation made the biggest damage to the forest of Costa Rica. Luckily things are changing now."



Costa Rica has now an outstanding legislation for conservation of natural resources and sustainable

agricultural production. The Decreto Ejecutivo N° 30962-MINAE authorises the payment for environmental services in agroforestry systems, including silvopastoral systems.

For more information on the legislation please visit the National Imprenta of Costa Rica in the following link:

[The Decreto Ejecutivo N° 30962-MINAE](#)

For more information on the GEF-LEAD project please visit the project web site:

[Integrated Silvopastoral Approaches to Ecosystem Management](#)
